

FROM EUROMAIDAN TO WAR:

A decade of European and American policies towards Ukraine

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction topic

When the Russian forces crossed the Ukrainian border on 24 February 2022, effectively marking the start of Vladimir Putin's full-scale war of aggression, the European continent was drawn again into a military conflict that it had been unwilling to fight. Up until that moment, in fact, the European Union (EU) had conducted a policy of appeasement towards the Russian Federation, allowing Putin to act undisturbed against his neighbouring countries. Even when the Crimean Peninsula was illegitimately annexed in winter 2014 as a response to the Euromaidan uprisings, the EU response was weak, limited to economic sanctions.¹ As a consequence, it did not lead to any significant obstruction of Russian aims, so much so that the war in Donbass began just a few months later. Yet, the reaction to the 2022 invasion was completely different. More impactful sanctions were immediately adopted, together with an exponential increase in military aid, which in turn allowed Ukraine to contain the Russian forces and avoid the quick capitulation that the Kremlin had predicted.²

Similarly, the United States (US) had followed a comparable approach over the last decade. Since its independence in 1991, Ukraine has been considered by the Americans as a possible ally due to its strategic position between the eastern bloc of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Russian Federation. For this reason, economic relations between the two nations gradually increased over the span of the years, but not to a significant level.³ Consequently, Russia was able to invade and occupy Crimea without any serious repercussions, as Ukraine was left defenceless. The US however did not limit itself to only condemning the aggression, but began backing Ukraine with military aid at the start of the Donbass conflict, permitting the nation to sustain the costs of the war.⁴ Therefore, from 2014 to 2022 the partnership between Ukraine and the US evolved significantly, allowing Kyiv to take advantage of its ties with America to defend itself. After the 2022 conflict, their alliance was further enhanced, and as of now (June 2025) Kyiv considers itself one of the closest allies of the United States.

¹ Kiegan Barron, "The Annexation of Crimea and EU Sanctions: An Ineffective Response", *The Arbutus Review* 13, no. 1 (4 November 2022): 122-126.

² Richard Stojar, "The Russian Invasion and Its Failure in the First Days", *Defense & Security Analysis* 39, no. 3 (3 July 2023): 296-311.

³ Volodymyr Dubovyk, "U.S. – Ukraine Relations in a Changing Security Environment", *PONARS* 299 (November 2003): 2.

⁴ Cory Welt, "Ukraine: Background, Conflict with Russia, and U.S. Policy", *Current Politics and Economics of Russia, Eastern and Central Europe* 35, no. 2 (2020): 153-218.

This thesis will focus on the policies that the Western bloc — here represented by the EU and the US — has adopted towards Ukraine in the last decade, using the Euromaidan protests that arose in Kyiv in late 2013 as a starting point. These developments marked the beginning of the dramatic descent of the nation into the abyss of war, from the Russian invasion of the Crimean Peninsula and the proxy-war in Donbass and Luhansk, to the full-scale invasion of 2022. During this time period, the relationships that Ukraine had developed with the EU and the USA underwent radical changes, shifting away from European integration in favour of more aggressive military reforms aimed at ensuring the nation's survival and its acceptance into NATO.⁵

Research question

My research aims to examine how the political, economic, and military relationships that the West maintained with Kyiv have changed up to the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States (7 November 2024), and to assess how the ongoing war has shaped the EU and NATO's attitudes towards Ukraine, which considered them its main foreign policy aspirations. The research question, therefore, is "How did the political, economic, and military policies of the EU and the USA vis-à-vis Ukraine evolve, 2013-2024?". The sub-questions that will follow are, respectively, "How did the policies of the EU vis-à-vis Ukraine evolve, 2013-2024?" (*Chapter two*), "How did the policies of the US vis-à-vis Ukraine evolve, 2013-2024?" (*Chapter three*), and "How do the EU and US policies vis-à-vis Ukraine compare?" (*Chapter four*).

Structure

This thesis will include four main chapters, followed by a brief conclusion to summarise their findings. *Chapter one* will expand on this introductory section by adding the conceptual frameworks to be used in this research, a historiography section on the EU and US perspectives on the Ukraine war, and a detailed account of the sources that will be adopted and how they will be analysed. *Chapter two* is where the real research begins, as it will cover the European policy reactions to the conflict in Ukraine since Euromaidan. *Chapter three* will deal with the American policy on the same events. These chapters mirror each other, meaning that they will both have the same structure. Their corpus will in fact have three main paragraphs, each following a specific time frame: the Euromaidan uprisings and the Crimean invasion, from 2013 to 2014 (*paragraph one*), the

⁵ Mehmet Alkanalka, "The Path to War: Ukraine's NATO membership", *Journal of International Relations and Political Science Studies – JIRPSS*, no. 7 (28 April 2023): 55–75.

proxy wars in Donbass and Luhansk, from 2014 to 2022 (*paragraph two*) and the full-scale aggression, from 2022 to 2024 (*paragraph three*). Finally, *Chapter four* will compare the different perspectives of each side, again following the same three-paragraph division for the above time periods. This last chapter will have a slightly shorter length than the previous ones to avoid possible repetitions. The main body of this research, therefore, will be in the second and third chapters.

Orientation

This section provides the essential historical background for the thesis. Therefore, it considers the history of Ukraine from its independence, in 1991, to the current war against Russia. An accurate description of these events is the necessary basis for the entire research, and as such, all the following chapters will be based upon this paragraph. However, due to length constraints, this section is only going to focus on the events that are directly relevant to the thesis, and will consequently avoid mentioning other aspects of Ukrainian history that are deemed unrelated.

Ukraine declared its independence from the Soviet Union on 24 August 1991, an action deemed by the Verkhovna Rada, the Ukrainian Supreme Council, as necessary to protect the nation's safety. The declaration, which was agreed by 346 votes to 1, was in fact the political response to a Communist-backed coup that occurred from 19 to 21 August, the failure of which showcased the nationalist ambitions of Ukraine.⁶ The decision was ultimately approved by a referendum on 1 December, with 92% of Ukrainian citizens voting in favour of independence.⁷ At the same time, the newly formed Ukraine also banned all political party subsidised by the KGB, the main Soviet security agency, and gained control of all the armed forces present on its territory, including nuclear weapons.⁸

⁶ Taras Kuzio, *"Ukraine: Perestroika to Independence"*, 2nd ed (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000): 198.

⁷ Peter J. Potichnyj, "The Referendum and Presidential Elections in Ukraine", *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 33, no. 2 (June 1991): 123–38.

⁸ William Walker, "Nuclear Weapons and the Former Soviet Republics", *International Affairs* 68, no. 2 (April 1992): 255–77.



Figure 1. Map of Ukraine (1991).

Source: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/caught-between-east-and-west-ukraine-struggles-its-migration-policy>.

This factor became the primary concern of the international community regarding the newly independent Ukraine. At the same time, the neo-elected President Leonid Kravchuk favoured dialogue with Moscow and Washington and agreed that his nation should be part of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), but simultaneously he sought guarantees from Russia about the dismantlement of these weapons once they were transferred to its territory.⁹ As such, Kravchuk was among the signatories of the Lisbon Protocol on 23 May 1992, which encouraged dialogue with the Kremlin and bound Ukraine to “guarantee the elimination of all nuclear weapons, including strategic offensive arms, located in its territory”.¹⁰ This signing opened up a second stage of negotiations, which ended in 1994 with the Budapest Memorandum, ratified by Ukraine, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Thanks to the mediation of the latter, Russian President Boris Yeltsin finally agreed to concede Kyiv the security guarantees it was asking for, thus recognising Washington as an essential mediator in his relations with Ukraine.¹¹

That same year Leonid Kuchma was elected as the new Ukrainian president. His policies were ambivalent, and reflected the complex geopolitical situation of his nation: on the one hand, he worked to establish closer ties with the Western bloc, on the other he found himself forced to

⁹ Alina Shymanska, "Rethinking the Budapest Memorandum from the Perspective of Ukrainian-Russian Relations in the Post-Soviet Period", *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 14, no. 4 (31 December 2020): 29–50.

¹⁰ Leonid Kravchuk, "Treaty Lisbon Protocol". *US Department of State*, Lisbon, 23 May 1992.

¹¹ Nadia Schadow, "The Denuclearization of Ukraine: Consolidating Ukrainian Security", *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 20 (1996): 271–87.

appease the Kremlin. Nonetheless, the first progress towards a link westwards was made during his presidency, as he led Ukraine to join NATO's Partnership for Peace Programme, establishing contact with the Organisation for the first time.¹² Moreover, on 9 November 1995, Ukraine also joined the Council of Europe, thus adhering to the fundamental values recognised by the EU.¹³

Yet, these initial advances were not unchallenged. The presidential elections of 2004 saw several irregularities, as Viktor Yushchenko, the candidate supported by Kuchma, was defeated by Victor Janukovyč, who was favoured by the Ukrainian elites, after the latter gained more than 1.2 million votes from the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, which appeared out of nowhere in the final recount of the vote, hence winning the elections with a 2.5% margin.¹⁴ The results triggered the Orange Revolution, a series of protests against Janukovyč which began in Maidan Nezalezhnosti, the central square of Kyiv, on 22 November 2004. The demonstrations proved successful, as after two weeks the Supreme Court of Ukraine declared the election invalid, and on the re-run in December Yushchenko won with a 2% margin.¹⁵ It was the first time that Ukraine saw its rule of law challenged since its independence, and the response from the Orange Revolution signalled the will of the citizens to remain aligned with the West.

Under Yushchenko's presidency, the most notable event for Ukraine was the twenty-first NATO Summit in Bucharest, between 2 and 4 April 2008. The slow but steady process of internal reforms had allowed Kyiv to gain closer ties with NATO, and on 4 April the members of the Organisation had to decide whether to grant it accession or not. To avoid provoking Russia, Ukraine was not granted a Membership Action Plan (MAP), the formal mechanism to guide the accession process, but it was assured that it "will become a member of NATO" in the future.¹⁶ Despite the lack of a precise timeframe, the Bucharest Declaration set out the basis for a more intense co-operation between Ukraine and NATO.¹⁷

Despite these advances, the 2010 elections confirmed Janukovyč as the new president. His presidency was characterised by a realignment towards Russia, after it began to pressure the energy sector of Ukraine: as such, Janukovyč withdrew Ukraine from NATO talks to appease Putin.¹⁸

¹² Volodymyr Grabchak and Syeda Myra Naqvi, "Ukrainian History and Perspective", *Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College*, 2024, 1–22.

¹³ "Honouring of obligations and commitments by Ukraine". Parliamentary Assembly (Resolution 1466), *Council of Europe*, 2005.

¹⁴ Adrian Karatnycky, "Ukraine's Orange Revolution", *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 2 (April 2005): 35–52.

¹⁵ Grabchak and Naqvi, "Ukrainian History and Perspective", 7.

¹⁶ "Bucharest Summit Declaration". Point 23, *North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*, Bucharest, 3 April 2008.

¹⁷ James Arbuthnot, "The Bucharest Summit and the Future of NATO", *The RUSI Journal* 153, no. 3 (June 2008): 40–44.

¹⁸ Paul D'Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilised Divorce to Uncivil War*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

Moreover, in November 2013 he also refrained from signing the Association Agreement (AA), a bilateral treaty between the EU and Ukraine aimed at fostering their co-operation which had been under discussion since March 2012, and which would have meant a significant step towards a future membership of the Union. That same day, 21 November, Maidan Square was again filled with protesters against Janukovyč, as the Euromaidan Revolution began. By 30 November there were more than a hundred thousand people in Kyiv rallying against their government and Russia, waving flags of Ukraine and the EU. Despite the adoption of harsher laws against the protests, they continued to grow in number for the next months, until the breaking point on 20 February 2014, when almost one hundred people were killed by the regime police: the next day Janukovyč was forced to flee to Russia.¹⁹

These events, and the lack of direct European support, pushed Putin to directly intervene in Ukraine, after declaring the new provisional government to be illegitimate. On 27 February, Russian troops without insignia landed in Crimea, and quickly occupied the peninsula. Subsequently, a referendum was held on 16 March, asking whether Crimea should join Russia, which was agreed to by 96.77% of the voters, even though the conditions under which it was held have been deemed irregular, and the results have not been recognised by the Verkhovna Rada and most of the international community.²⁰ Yet again, the lack of a direct Western intervention allowed Russia to maintain control over the peninsula, leading to further instability in Ukraine.

Taking advantage of the weakness of their central government, several cities in Donetsk and Luhansk, two bordering regions with Russia, began to oppose Oleksandr Turchynov, the Ukrainian interim president, and asked for referenda similar to that held in Crimea. Russia immediately got involved in the protests, and by 12 April 2014, separatist militias supported by the Kremlin seized key governmental buildings in the regions, thus initiating the Donbas War.²¹ The first phase of the conflict ended in January 2015 with a Russian political victory. Following the successes on the battlefield, Putin forced President Petro Poroshenko to sign a ceasefire agreement in Minsk (12 February 2015), which compelled Ukraine to withdraw most of its troops and to create a buffer zone in the region, de facto losing control of the territories occupied by the separatists.²²

¹⁹ Dmitry Shevsky, "Euromaidan Revolution in Ukraine", in *Handbook of Revolutions in the 21st Century*, ed. Jack A. Goldstone, Leonid Grinin, and Andrey Korotayev, Societies and Political Orders in Transition (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 851–63.

²⁰ Anton Bebler, "The Russian-Ukrainian Conflict over Crimea", *Teorija in Praks* 52 (2015): 196–219.

²¹ Serhiy Kudelia, "The Donbas Rift", *Russian Politics & Law* 54, no. 1 (2 January 2016): 5–27.

²² Grabchak and Naqvi, "Ukrainian History and Perspective", 13.

Despite the Minsk Agreement, several violations of the ceasefire were registered in the following seven years.²³ The conflict, in short, never actually ended. As such, Ukraine had to rebuild itself and its international prestige after the events of 2013–2015, and it gradually began to strengthen its relations with the EU and the US. During the presidencies of Poroshenko and his successor Volodymyr Zelenskyy, significant internal reforms took place with the declared aim of fighting the astonishing levels of corruption in the country.²⁴ These policies were directly aimed at re-establishing sound diplomatic relations with the West, so as to ensure future membership of the EU and NATO and the security guarantees they would bring. Both Brussels and Washington acknowledged Kyiv's commitments, and by 2022 their relations had significantly improved.

The attempts of Ukraine to push for integration within the EU and NATO were the main reasons that prompted Russia to intervene with another military conflict.²⁵ By late 2021, Putin began massing his army on the Ukrainian borders, while the West's attempts to find a diplomatic solution remained unheard. On 21 February 2022, Putin declared the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and three days later, on 24 February, a force of two hundred thousand soldiers crossed the Russian and Belarusian borders with Ukraine, in what was announced as a "special military operation".²⁶ The West reacted immediately by imposing stronger sanctions against Moscow, and by sending aid and military equipment to Ukraine, which played a significant role in stopping the initial Russian advances and in recapturing some of the lost territories by April. Since then, the conflict slowly bogged down into trench warfare. Up until 2025, the war is still far from over, with neither side seemingly having the upper hand. In these three years, the support Ukraine received from the West increased exponentially, as both factions are now heavily reliant on each other. The election of Donald Trump as President of the United States may subvert this tendency, but so far his policies have proved that he is not intent on renouncing a strong and independent Ukraine.²⁷ The future for the Ukrainian people is still uncertain.

²³ Mihail Evans, "How the European Union Failed to Prevent the Ukraine Conflict", *Public Humanities* 1 (2025): e97.

²⁴ Joanna Rohozinska and Vitaliy Shpak, "Ukraine's Post-Maidan Struggles: The Rise of an 'Outsider' President", *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 3 (2019): 33–47.

²⁵ Michael Dunford, "Causes of the Crisis in Ukraine", *International Critical Thought* 13, no. 1 (2 January 2023): 89–125.

²⁶ Grabchak and Naqvi, "Ukrainian History and Perspective", 16.

²⁷ Kimmage, Michael, "The World Trump Wants: American Power in the New Age of Nationalism", *Foreign Affairs* 104, no. 2 (April 2025): 8–21.

THEORY AND METHOD

This chapter introduces the basic pillars upon which this thesis is based. Firstly, it delineates the theoretical and conceptual framework of the research, presenting the concepts of *actorness* and *hegemony* to be used in *Chapter two* and *Chapter three*. Secondly, a historiographic section follows, which analyses a corpus of twenty-two peer-reviewed academic articles on the relationship between the EU and the US vis-à-vis Ukraine. Then, it describes the primary sources that the thesis will use and provides a section of source criticism. The chapter concludes with a short paragraph about the methodology it delineates how these sources have been gathered and how they are going to be analysed.

1.1 Theoretical and conceptual framework

Due to the nature of the topic of study, this thesis will not follow a main theoretical framework. In fact, the conflict in Ukraine is still raging at the time this research is being written, and its unpredictability may pose a serious threat to the use and application of any theory. In order to avoid such an issue, I have decided not to constrain the research to fixed doctrines. For the same reason I have also restricted the timeframe to the results of the 2024 American elections (7 November 2024), so as not to consider the policies that the administration of Donald Trump has vowed to adopt, or will adopt in the future. By doing so, I aim to better frame my research and avoid any possible counterarguments against the framework of the thesis. Therefore, instead of a theory, this study will be predominantly based on the analysis of primary sources. I firmly believe that this method is better suited to a contemporary topic, as it allows to dwell on the immediacy of the events more naturally than a fixed doctrine, which may instead lead to confirmation biases. Furthermore, primary source analysis will permit more flexibility in the interpretation of the historical events that my thesis will be built upon, enabling me to select the perspective from which to analyse specific facts.

Yet, the research will also be based on specific concepts linked to the European and American attitudes in international relations (IR). *Chapter two*, which will examine the EU's perspective towards Ukraine, will apply the concept of *actorness* as defined by Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler, which represents the capacity of the EU to take the initiative as a major

player in the international arena.²⁸ This approach follows three main notions: *presence*, *opportunity* and *capability*. The first indicates the EU's ability to exert its influence outside its borders, the second represents the circumstances that shape its international conduct and the third, finally, denotes the internal capacity of the Union that allows it to act with respect to other nations. This definition will allow for a thorough consideration of all the criteria of the research question inside a clearly established framework: the EU's political, economic and military policies. Furthermore, the lack of actorness has been considered Europe's major flaw in its foreign relations during the last decade, and I consider it the most suitable concept for the analysis of its policies towards Ukraine and Russia after the Euromaidan uprisings.

Chapter three will focus instead on American policies in Eastern Europe, and will consequently follow a different concept, that of *hegemony*. In order to comprehend US behaviour and its reasoning, this research will consider the United States both as a global hegemon with strategic economic and militaristic interests in the region surrounding Ukraine, and as a powerful nation that exercises its influence to ensure the survival of liberal and democratic values. By doing so, I avoid directly validating a realist or liberal perspective, maintaining the flexibility of analysis that the absence of a theory allows. For this reason, I have chosen the broad definition of US hegemony given by Brian C. Schmidt, which he derived by comparing studies from realist, liberal and constructivist schools.²⁹ He labels it as the capacity of the US to possess a significant material power and to exert their leadership upon foreign sovereign nations, two elements that represent the common points of all the definitions from these schools of thought. This concept alone will provide sufficient insight into the motives that drove Washington to protect Ukraine and to start a proxy war against Russia over the past ten years.

Chapter four, in conclusion, will limit itself to comparing European actorness and American hegemony in Eastern Europe and to highlighting the main differences between these two notions in international relations.

²⁸ Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler, *"The European Union as a global actor"*, 2nd ed (London; New York: Routledge, 2006): 33.

²⁹ Brian C. Schmidt, "Hegemony: A Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis and Its Application to the Debate on American Hegemony", in *Hegemony and World Order*, ed. by Piotr Dutkiewicz, Tom Casier, and Jan Aart Scholte, 1st ed. (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2021; Routledge, 2020), 32–47.

1.2 Historiography

The following section of historiography will look more closely at this debate, focusing on a selection of twenty-two peer-reviewed academic articles on the diplomatic relations of the EU and the US with Ukraine. Much has already been written about the state of Ukraine's foreign relations with the West, but the academic debate is currently split into two different currents. The first trend follows the post-Euromaidan years until the launch of the Russian invasion (2014-2022). The authors in this school of thought view the future of Ukraine with a slight optimism, despite the continuous Russian interference and the border war in Donbass afflicting the country. The main priority was the improvement of diplomatic relations with the European Union, so as to guarantee future membership. Ukrainian diplomacy, therefore, had to reform the nation to prioritise its democracy and secure the candidate status with the Union. At the same time, the EU had to ensure that the continuous support it was offering to Ukraine would have eventually lead to its admission. This, in turn, would have represented a major opportunity for the EU itself, as it would have finally signalled the easternmost expansion of its borders.

Yet, after the Russian invasion, the European project was abruptly put aside. Even though the idea was not discarded, the main priority for Ukraine, now at war against a stronger and better equipped enemy, became the securing of its own territories in spite of the economic advantages that the EU would have provided. This explains the shift towards NATO (and, consequently, the USA) that most of the post-2022 scholars have claimed had to be Kyiv's prime concern. As a result, with his war of aggression Putin had contributed to the enhancement of the cooperation between Ukraine and the entire Western bloc, the very thing he wanted to prevent with the conflict.³⁰

As it was mentioned before, pre-2022 literature tends to assert Kyiv's need to join the European Union. Scholars at the time viewed this process with optimism, as both parties had a strong mutual cooperation aimed at achieving the same objective. Yet, the debate was highly vivid and heterogeneous, as most scholars proposed different solutions to reach their common objective. This was primarily due to the relatively stable political circumstances that arose in Ukraine after the Minsk agreements, which encouraged intellectuals to reflect on the future of the country by examining a broader range of options. Still, although Russia was considered as the main obstacle to Kyiv's aspiration and the Crimean occupation was seen as a key turning point by the

³⁰ Stepan Prydun, "Current aspects of cooperation between Ukraine and NATO 2019–2022", *Humanitarian studies: history and pedagogy*, no. 2 (2023): 33–39.

majority of scholars, almost all of them failed to foresee the scale of the 2022 intervention. This, in turn, explains why the historiography for this thesis has been divided into two different blocs.

The EU and Ukraine

The first piece of literature to consider — and the only one written before 2014 — looks at the EU's initiatives for the decade to come in Ukraine. Here, Gawrich et al. examine the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) amid the processes of Europeanization in Eastern Europe, demonstrating its failures in achieving its declared objectives.³¹ The implementation of the ENP, according to them, failed due to its limited capabilities and Russian interference. Yet, they pushed for a continuation of similar policies, considering the ENP to be just the start of a much longer process aimed at granting Kyiv a possible membership in the Union. Almost ten years later, Kataryna Wolczuk analysed the steps that Ukraine needed to take to have membership granted, arguing that it would have to shift its foreign policy domestically in order to pursue the reforms needed to comply with EU laws.³² However, she went beyond that by framing these reforms as a mean to completely rebuild the Ukrainian constitution, which was being pushed by Brussels as an imperative to meet the requirements of membership in the Union. Although this first section focuses primarily on Ukraine rather than the EU, it is nonetheless significant as it highlights that the process of integration came from both parts.

On the opposite, Yakoviyk et al. proclaimed that European integration, although it had to remain the main priority for the government of Kyiv, was not to be considered the only foreign commitment for the nation.³³ To counter the constant Russian threats the scholars proposed enhancing Ukraine's involvement with international organisations, with the United Nations (UN) as the main objective, so as to gain international leverage and establish itself as a leading country in Eastern Europe. This could have provided the much-needed securitisation of its territory. Moreover, Taras Kuzio examined how the Union alone could not grant Ukraine the military capabilities to defend itself.³⁴ A solution for this dilemma could have involved accepting Russian interests in

³¹ Andrea Gawrich, Inna Melnykovska, and Rainer Schweickert, "Neighbourhood Europeanization through ENP: The Case of Ukraine", *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 48, no. 5 (November 2010): 1209–35.

³² Kataryna Wolczuk, "State Building and European Integration in Ukraine", *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 60, no. 6 (2 November 2019): 736–54.

³³ Ivan V. Yakoviyk et al., "National Security Policy in Ukraine: A Change in the System of Power Relations of the Modern World", *Revista San Gregorio* 42 (15 December 2020): 224–35.

³⁴ Taras Kuzio, "Russia–Ukraine Crisis: The Blame Game, Geopolitics and National Identity", *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 3 (16 March 2018): 462–73.

Sevastopol and Crimea and recognising Russian-speaking minorities in the East, in exchange for the freedom to join the EU. Although this appears to be a rather utopian possibility, it could have liberated Ukraine from the blame game that Moscow and Brussels were having towards it, as both sides firmly believed themselves to be justified in the conflict.

Finally, a significant section of pre-2022 literature focused instead on the new geopolitical order that was formed after the occupation of Crimea. This is when the concept of European actorness comes into play, introduced by Anna-Sophie Maass.³⁵ She claimed that EU state-building was halted in 2013-2015 due to the weakness of the Union itself, as it did not have the means to avoid the Russian interventions in Ukrainian territories. Yet, after Crimea, European actorness increased significantly, marking it as a critical moment for the geopolitical balance in the East. Similarly, Alicja Stanco-Wawrzynska also asserted how Russia halted NATO and EU's expansions eastwards with the occupation of Crimea.³⁶ This signified the end of the order that established in the region after the fall of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). With its military actions, Putin became an active threat to European security, as its Eastern flank was then under the shadows of war. The events of 2014, in short, were the key moment in the "geopolitical awakening" of the EU, as Nitoiu and Sus put it.³⁷ Now that it felt the need to protect its Eastern Neighbourhood, Europe had to engage in an active confrontation against Russia and Belarus, leading to a more strategic approach to the region and an increased use of its hard power to enhance security and military cooperation with Kyiv. Finally, the geopolitical equilibrium in the East was explored by Ademmer et al., who argued that the crisis originated from the mutual interests that Russia and Europe had in Ukraine, as their economies were both dependent on the region.³⁸ On the one hand, Europe was interested in the promotion of democracy through diplomacy and soft power to gain access to Ukrainian resources — mainly grain and natural gas —, while on the other Russia exploited its economic ties and the common language and culture to reassert its influence over what was once the territory of its former empire. These shared interests made a direct confrontation inevitable. Yet, the majority of pre-2022 literature failed to predict the scale of the

³⁵ Anna-Sophie Maass, "The Actorness of the EU's State-Building in Ukraine - Before and after Crimea", *Geopolitics* 25, no. 2 (14 March 2020): 387–406.

³⁶ Alicja Stanco-Wawrzynska, "Ukraine and the End of Post-Cold War Europe", *Polish Political Science Yearbook* 47, no. 1 (2018): 151–55.

³⁷ Cristian Nitoiu and Monika Sus, "Introduction: The Rise of Geopolitics in the EU's Approach in Its Eastern Neighbourhood", *Geopolitics* 24, no. 1 (January 2019): 1–19.

³⁸ Esther Ademmer, Laure Delcour, and Kataryna Wolczuk, "Beyond Geopolitics: Exploring the Impact of the EU and Russia in the 'Contested Neighborhood'", *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 57, no. 1 (2 January 2016): 1–18.

future conflict with Russia, and as Siddi pointed out, Ukraine had almost been disregarded by most scholars in the historiographies of EU-Russian relations during the 2010s.³⁹

After the war broke out, the resolute and immediate intervention of the European Union was met with surprise by a large number of academics, and a significant part of the literature shifted to a more accurate analysis of the pre-war years (2014-2022), seeking to explain the firm commitment of the EU. Rabinovych and Pintsch, for instance, did not limit themselves to attributing the European response to a moral duty, given the unimaginable scale of Putin's attack.⁴⁰ Instead, they claimed that it was mainly the improvement of relations with Ukraine that pushed the Union to commit itself to defend the allied nation at all costs. In particular, the authors focused on the path dependency that had been affecting both sides, as they had become economically and politically tied by the time the war began. In addition, the study of this relationship from 2004 to 2022 conducted by Raik et al has shown that the EU sought competition with Russia only through its soft power, which proved to be ineffective in containing Putin's ambitions⁴¹. Conversely, it was the clear stance that the Union took after the invasion that represented its "geopolitical awakening", as, unlike with Crimea, it realised that an active engagement against Russia was crucial not only for Ukraine's protection, but for the future of the Union's credibility as a whole.⁴² Instead, Giselle Bosse argued that the firm response of the Union was possible because it felt the responsibility to protect innocent civilians who identified themselves as Europeans.⁴³ Hence, the intervention signalled the EU's decision to stop portraying itself as a promoter of values in favour of prioritising its safeguard power. In addition, the immediate adoption of harsh sanctions against the Kremlin (the first package was approved a day before the launch of the invasion, on 23 February 2022) showed unprecedented solidarity among member states, as for the first time they unanimously agreed to bear the costs of renouncing the Russian markets. This increase in solidarity was also noted by Mitchell A. Orenstein, who wrote about how more cohesive the EU's responses were after the war.⁴⁴ The decision to protect Ukraine at all costs was demonstrated by the firmness with which the

³⁹ Marco Siddi, "The Partnership That Failed: EU-Russia Relations and the War in *Ukraine*", *Journal of European Integration* 44, no. 6 (18 August 2022): 893–98.

⁴⁰ Maryna Rabinovych and Anne Pintsch, "From the 2014 Annexation of Crimea to the 2022 Russian War on Ukraine: Path Dependence and Socialization in the EU–Ukraine Relations", *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 62, no. 5 (September 2024): 1239–59.

⁴¹ Kristi Raik et al., "EU Policy towards Ukraine: Entering Geopolitical Competition over European Order", *The International Spectator* 59, no. 1 (2 January 2024): 39–58.

⁴² Raik et al., p. 53.

⁴³ Giselle Bosse, "Values, Rights, and Changing Interests: The EU's Response to the War against Ukraine and the Responsibility to Protect Europeans", *Contemporary Security Policy* 43, no. 3 (3 July 2022): 531–46.

⁴⁴ Mitchell A. Orenstein, "The European Union's Transformation after Russia's Attack on Ukraine", *Journal of European Integration* 45, no. 3 (3 April 2023): 333–42.

refugee crisis — the biggest in European history — was handled, even by member states that had previously been against immigration. The decision to back Kyiv with military support as well, the author argued, contributed to elevating Europe as a major global actor for the first time in decades, as its expenditure on defence equipment matched that of the United States.

The US and Ukraine

The United States, on the other hand, is considered to have pursued a more active role in the events that led to the Russian escalation. Contrary to the EU, which was depicted as politically weak and unable to act in defence of Ukraine in the event of a conflict, the US has been working incessantly since 2014 to ensure the security of Kyiv, in order to grant it the membership into NATO that was promised in 2008. Yet, American literature is far more divided than its European counterpart, primarily due to the geographic distance from Ukraine. In fact, the American perspective, at least until 2022, did not consider the Crimean occupation as a direct threat to their security, but rather as an illegitimate violation of international law.⁴⁵ The decision to counter Russian expansionism with sanctions and the sending of military equipment, then, can be explained as an opportunity to weaken a major threat in foreign politics. Although most American scholars did actively support such policies, their debates have constantly focused on the blame game between Russia and the West. Unlike European literature, a major current attributed to the US's approval of the enlargement of NATO the cause that forced Russia to intervene in Ukraine, marking the events as a self-defence act from Moscow. The main thinker behind this was John Mearsheimer, who already in 2014 addressed Putin's actions as defensive measures.⁴⁶ The solution he proposed to end the crisis entailed the neutrality of Ukraine, which would have had to renounce its applications for NATO and EU membership, in exchange for a Russian promise of non-intervention. The country would therefore become a buffer zone between NATO and Russia, and its neutrality, if respected, could have prevented any future conflict. A few months after he wrote his publication, Mearsheimer held a compelling debate with Stephen Sestanovich and Michael McFaul, who challenged his views by arguing that Western physical expansionism was itself a reaction to Putin's ideological expansionism against the former territories of the USSR.⁴⁷ Therefore, Ukrainian membership in

⁴⁵ Hanefi Yazici and Yusuf Yildirim, "The Reaction USA and EU to the Russian Federation's Intervention in Crimea", *OPUS Uluslararası Toplum Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 7 April 2021: 2709.

⁴⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault", *Foreign Affairs* (September 2014), 1–12.

⁴⁷ Michael McFaul, Stephen Sestanovich, and John J. Mearsheimer, "Faulty Powers: Who Started the Ukraine Crisis?", *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 6 (December 2014): 167–78.

NATO was just the country's reaction to the continuous threats that Russia was directing against it, and it could have been avoided if it had been allowed to retain its sovereign powers.

Nevertheless, many other scholars agreed with Mearsheimer's thinking, especially after Putin launched his full-scale invasion in 2022. One of them was Robert Hunter, who added that Ukraine, together with Georgia, had been misled by NATO with security assurances that the Organisation knew it could not offer.⁴⁸ He also insisted on the need for a neutral Ukraine, acting as a buffer nation against both Russian and European expansionism as a compromise. In other words, if Kyiv could not have been Russian, it could not have been European either. Other scholars, such as Cafruny and Fouskas argued that the ongoing conflict had to be considered as a NATO proxy war that originated, again, from the American decision to prevent Russian influence eastwards in order to expand the Alliance in that same region.⁴⁹ Following the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's assessment that American aid to Ukraine was meant to "weaken Russia", the authors claimed that the war could only benefit the US, while the EU, despite of its non-involvement in the conflict, had to bear the most of its economic consequences over the past years.⁵⁰ A similar position is shared by Alkanalka who, after examining governmental documents from both Russia and Ukraine, argued that the escalation in 2022 was part of the Russian strategy to block the continuous NATO expansion towards its borders: what Ukraine saw as a priority for its security was perceived by Russia as a threat.⁵¹ For this reason, the author considers the approval of Kyiv's membership request in 2008 to be a key turning point in the events that led to the conflict, although it was not followed by any concrete step by the Alliance. The same stance was also reassessed by Cafruny et al, who divided the responsibilities for the conflict between the Anglo-American policies of asserting their control over Europe by favouring a NATO expansion in Ukraine and the Russian ambition to maintain its control over its former Soviet republics.⁵²

Against Mearsheimer, there were those who pictured the American intervention as a moral obligation to protect a sovereign allied country from an unjustified aggression. This more liberal view had already been shared before 2022, as many advocated for a more impactful US response to the occupation of Crimea. Carl Gershman, for instance, saw the importance of Ukraine as its

⁴⁸ Robert Hunter, "The Ukraine Crisis: Why and What Now?", *Survival* 64, no. 1 (2 January 2022): 7–28.

⁴⁹ Alan Cafruny and Vassilis K. Fouskas, "Ukraine, Europe, and the Re-Routing of Globalization", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 26, no. 1 (2 January 2024): 1–22.

⁵⁰ Cafruny and Fouskas, "Ukraine, Europe", 7.

⁵¹ Mehmet Alkanalka, "The path to war: Ukraine's NATO membership", *Journal of International Relations and Political Science Studies – JIRPSS*, no. 7 (28 April 2023): 55–75.

⁵² Alan Cafruny et al., "Ukraine, Multipolarity and the Crisis of Grand Strategies", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 25, no. 1 (2 January 2023): 1–21.

success or failure would have determined the fate of other endangered democracies worldwide.⁵³ Therefore, the international community was being tested as it had to decide the scale of its reaction against Russia. Michał Woźniak further stated that it was the Crimean crisis that brought the US to Eastern Europe, a territory in which they showed little interest until that moment.⁵⁴ This also explains the limited scale of their reaction in 2014 compared to the violent approach of the Russian federation, given that the control over that territory meant significantly more to Putin than to Obama. The US still vowed to support Ukraine, but not at the expense of risking any kind of dangerous escalation, as its primary aim was to contain the conflict rather than stopping it. Finally, Zelinska and Galaziuk pointed out that the diplomatic approach towards the West that Kyiv had been following in the past decades was not only aimed at providing greater security for its eastern borders and distancing itself from Moscow, but also at maintaining communication channels with NATO and the EU so as to place itself among the Western nations.⁵⁵ In short, this strategy could have been considered as the Ukrainian way of ensuring the privilege of being recognised as a “first world” nation in the future, after the end of the conflict.

Conclusion

The literature examined so far illustrates different Western tendencies towards Ukraine. Before the war, the idea of opening Ukrainian markets to Europe was considered the main priority, and Kyiv had to reform itself *economically*. In contrast, post-2022 scholars were more focused on the *militaristic* reforms of the country, with internal defence taking the spot. However, both sections considered Ukraine as a secondary actor that lacked any freedom of action, as its policy options were seen as being dependent on the commitment of NATO or the EU, which were viewed as the main actors in these events. Therefore, after the Crimean crisis their initiatives have been thoroughly discussed, as they were — and still are — the real architects of Ukraine’s future: if the West were to stop sanctioning the Kremlin and sending its military support, or if Russia were to agree to discuss peace deals, the war would likely be over. For these reasons the academic debate analysed so far has not been centred on Ukraine itself, but it has instead revolved around how the actions of Russia, the EU and the USA shaped Kyiv’s foreign policies.

⁵³ Carl Gershman, "A Fight for Democracy: Why Ukraine Matters", *World Affairs* 177, no. 47 (2014): 47–56.

⁵⁴ Michał Woźniak, "The Ukraine Crisis and Shift in Us Foreign Policy", *International Studies. Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal* 18, no. 2 (30 December 2016): 87–102.

⁵⁵ O. M. Zelinska and N. M. Galaziuk, "State and prospects of Ukrainian-US cooperation in the conditions of armed aggression by Russia against Ukraine", *The Actual Problems of Regional Economy Development* 1, no. 20 (13 June 2024): 53–62.

A second point that was highlighted by this section is how completely unprepared the West was for the Crimean occupation. Most of the literature is critical of European appeasement, arguing that it was crucial for the EU to increase its deterrence power. Although most of it failed to predict the extent to which the conflict would have evolved, the response that followed was already envisioned in 2014. Crimea, in short, worked as a wake-up call for the West, and by 2022 it was ready to intervene in favour of Kyiv significantly enough to stop Putin's aims, proving the efficiency of the policies advocated during those eight years. If Ukraine is still able to defend itself at the time this thesis is being written, it is mainly due to the shift of approach that the West pursued towards Eastern Europe.

1.3 Sources and source criticism

The thesis will be based on primary sources related to the last decade of Ukrainian history. The sources reflect a Western perspective on the events, and can be divided into sources internal to the European Union and to the United States. In addition, reports from the United Nations and NATO will be considered, as these institutions have explicitly condemned Russian military actions against Kyiv, thus aligning themselves with American and European viewpoints.⁵⁶ The documents vary from institutional reports and assessments, to presidential speeches and phone calls, as well as interviews with prominent expert in the field of international relations. The use of these sources is of particular relevance, as their institutions, in particular the UN, include members other than Western states, thus giving an even broader perspective at the events.

Such a variety of sources is beneficial for this research, as they will allow the assessment of different perspectives on Ukraine within the Western nations. For instance, these documents highlight a clash of ideas within actors in the same institutions, as when Russian forces began the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in February 2022, some NATO leaders were highly supportive of a direct military intervention – an event that, of course, has not happened so far.⁵⁷ Moreover, most of the documents come from actors or institutions that were directly involved in the diplomatic relationships between Ukraine and the West, which gives them an high degree of reliability. Yet, the current corpus may also pose disadvantages in its analysis. First of all, the majority of these documents is clustered in two specific time sections, the first ranging from the start of the

⁵⁶ Georgios Kostakos, "The United Nations and the Russian-Ukrainian War", in *Polarization, Shifting Borders and Liquid Governance: Studies on Transformation and Development in the OSCE Region* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2023), 383–95.

⁵⁷ Dalia Grybauskaitė. "Cowardly West? Or accomplices to Putin's war crimes?". *Grybauskaitė Press Centre*, 2 March 2022.

Euromaidan protests to the Minsk agreement for a ceasefire (November 2013 to February 2015) and the second starting at the launch of the Russian invasion (February 2022). The years in between leave a gap in primary sources, that may be explained by the “quieter” state of the battlefield and, thus, of the international attention given to Ukraine. In addition, a second problem may arise from the fact that all governmental sources come from actors who mostly share the same Western perspective on the events. Although various outliers are present, as recalled before, the thesis will mainly focus on a single viewpoint, which could result biased in some of its aspects. At last, the nature of part of the corpus itself may prove to be difficult to analyse. Phone calls are the main example, as their exact content is not openly known, but they are made available to the public only through a brief summary provided by the institutional websites of the actors involved.

1.4 Methodology

The primary sources for this thesis have been gathered from digital archives specialised on Ukrainian studies, such as University College London (UCL), which provides an online collection of documents from the 2013-2015 Ukrainian crisis, and the NATO Library on the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, containing the Alliance’s most relevant reports after February 2022.

The first collection follows both the American and European perspectives, and focuses on the political and economic reactions to Euromaidan and the Crimean occupation, with several governmental documents detailing the decisions to intervene and impose sanctions against the Russian elites. In addition, it includes reports from individual states within the European Union, such as France, Germany and the United Kingdom, allowing for a more heterogeneous analysis of the events. The NATO Library collection, on the other hand, will be primarily used to answer how the military policies of the Organisation evolved with respect to Ukraine. Additionally, a large section of the European prime sources comes from the archives of the European Council and the European Commission, while many American sources have been gathered from the online archives of the White House and the US Department of State.

Even if these corpora follow different time periods, thanks to the variety of their sources they all allow a focus on aspects of the research question that the others seem to leave aside: the military policies for the UCL archive and the economic ones for the NATO Library, with the political declarations for the remaining corpora. As such, the list of sources is complete enough to permit a thorough study of the thesis’ topic. A limited number of sources, instead, has been gathered separately, as they were not part of a specific catalogue.

The sources of the next chapters have been gathered as follows. Those of *Chapter Two* come from the digital archives of different EU institutions — mainly the European Commission — and the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies (for subchapters 2.2 and 2.3), with a minor sample of documents collected separately through individual research. *Chapter Three*, on the other hand, uses sources gathered from the digital archives of the White House, the US Department of State, the US Congress, and the UCL School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies (for subchapters 2.2 and 2.3), with a minor sample that has been collected separately. Only the records from the Biden Administration (2020-2024) used in subchapter 3.4 have been difficult to obtain, as they are restricted by the Presidential Records Act (PRA) and will not be publicly available until 2030. Therefore, they are not present in any archive, and had to be collected individually.

The corpus of documents will be analysed through interpretive research, a research paradigm that aims to better comprehend the topic of study by focusing on the meaning and context of its sources.⁵⁸ This kind of approach will allow me to define and analyse the context behind these documents, and to place them in a coherent and precise narrative. Interpretive research entails the study of a social phenomenon in its natural setting, meaning that the historical and socio-political context will be fundamental for the analysis of primary sources in this thesis. At the same time, the subjective experience of the actors involved will have to be taken into account, and a significant part of the study will focus on comprehending their unique point of view.

This may prove particularly challenging, as many participants did not have complete information on the unfolding events, or may have had a distorted perception due to the fog of war or their own ideologies, leading them to make incorrect declarations, even as heads of state. This research will therefore consider the actors of the source corpus as unequal among themselves, as their personal knowledge and biases could have had a significant impact on their external behaviour. The main benefit of interpretive analysis is its suitability for uncovering hidden reasons behind its sources, as I anticipate it will bring more significance to a research project like this. On this account, the sources collected for this study will not be analysed by considering only their content, but the context behind them will have to be taken into account.

⁵⁸ June S. Lowenberg, "Interpretive Research Methodology: Broadening the Dialogue", *Advances in Nursing Science* 16, no. 2 (December 1993): 57–69.

EUROPEAN POLICIES VIS-À-VIS UKRAINE

[2013-2024]

This chapter delves into the evolution of European political patterns in relation to Ukraine from the beginning of the Euromaidan uprisings in November 2013 until the election of Donald J. Trump as president of the United States for his second term, on 7 November 2024. The research question, therefore, is: “How did the policies of the EU vis-à-vis Ukraine evolve, 2013-2024?”. The following subchapters will each focus on a specific event from the last decade of Ukrainian history: Euromaidan and its consequences, the Russian invasion of Crimea and the war in Donbass, and the consequent full-scale war of aggression.

As mentioned in *Chapter One*, this chapter is based on the concept of European *actorness* as defined by Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler.⁵⁹ It will therefore consider the capacity of the EU to act outside of its borders and to exert its influence in these regions, by also considering its internal policies. The results will show a gradual increase in actorness, from an almost complete absence during the first Ukrainian crisis in 2013-2014 to the firm response of 2022, which contributed to Russia’s failure to achieve a swift victory in the war.

2.1 Introduction

Relationships between the EU and Ukraine began in December 1991, immediately after the country gained its independence from the USSR. They were based upon the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) signed in June 1994, and entered into force in March 1998.⁶⁰ The agreement, which enhanced the political cooperation on trade, justice and energy to Ukraine and the EU, was the first significant deal signed between the two parties, and it paved the way for the strengthening of their partnership in the following decades. The main Ukrainian priority was its membership in the European Union, which began to be formally discussed in 2002, although the European Commission was careful to avoid mentioning a specific deadline for this objective.⁶¹ As a matter of

⁵⁹ Bretherton and Vogler, "The European Union as a Global Actor".

⁶⁰ "PCA with Ukraine enters into force". *European Commission*, Brussels, 27 February 1998.

⁶¹ "Günter Verheugen Member of the European Commission responsible for Enlargement Entering the final stage The Economist Conference Vienna, 2 December 2002". *European Commission*, 3 December 2002.

fact, its speaker, Günter Verheugen, only highlighted the benefits that the EU enlargement of those years, with the integration of former Soviet satellite nations, would bring to Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, promoting stability and co-operation in Eastern Europe.

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw an enhancement in economic and political cooperation between Ukraine and the Union, which remained constant until 2014. In 2004, Ukraine became a member of the Eastern Partnership of the European Neighbourhood Policy, an EU framework aimed at strengthening ties with its bordering nations through joint cooperation in economic development, migration control and security.⁶² These approaches were bilateral, as Kyiv also worked to secure for itself the status of candidate member for the Union. On 1 July 2010, a law was published stating that it was a national prerogative to ensure “the integration of Ukraine into the European political, economic and legal area in order to obtain the EU membership”.⁶³ In short, both parties were seeking closer ties, and they were slowly reaching concrete results. The first twenty-five years of Ukrainian independence were all spent pursuing an European identity that ultimately clashed with Russia’s deep influence in the country. All of that would abruptly change in 2014.

2.2 EU-Ukraine relations during Euromaidan (2013-2014)

The relationship that the EU developed with Ukraine deteriorated in 2013. Tensions had already begun to arise in October 2011, when the former Ukrainian prime minister Julija Tymošenko was incarcerated for abuse of power, in what the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) called an “arbitrary [...] and illegitimate detention”.⁶⁴ President Viktor Janukovyč was therefore accused of violating the fundamental values of the European Union, marking the first major fracture with the government of Kyiv. This incident put at risk the signing of the Association Agreement. At the same time, Ukraine’s accession to the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) was put at risk. Yet, despite the disagreements, diplomatic efforts from both sides made the signing of both deals seem almost certain by the beginning of 2013.⁶⁵

⁶² Svitlana Holovko and Kateryna Vodolaskova, "EU-UKRAINE RELATIONS DEVELOPMENT POLICY: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CURRENT STATE", *Scientific works of National Aviation University. Series: Law Journal «Air and Space Law»* 2, no. 63 (30 June 2022): 35–41.

⁶³ “Overview of Ukraine-EU Relations”. *Mission of Ukraine to the European Union*, 15 April 2021.

⁶⁴ European Court of Human Rights, “Human Rights Court looks into criminal proceedings against former Ukrainian Prime Minister Tymoshenko”. *Council of Europe*, Strasbourg, 15 July 2013.

⁶⁵ Odysseas Spiliopoulos, "The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement as a Framework of Integration between the Two Parties", *Procedia Economics and Finance* 9 (2014): 256–63.

This prompted Russia, fearing that with the AA it could lose its control over the one-third of the Ukrainian economy it controlled, to exert pressure on Kyiv, and the first sanctions were imposed in August 2013 on all goods coming from Ukraine.⁶⁶ Therefore, due to the enormous pressure on the industrial production of his nation, president Janukovyč made the decision to refrain from signing the AA, which he announced in the Verkhovna Rada (the parliament of Ukraine) on the evening of 21 November 2013. That same night, thousands of protestors began gathering at Maidan Square in Kyiv to demonstrate against this withdrawal.⁶⁷

The initial European reaction was feeble, and for a week it did not raise its voice. Instead, it was decided to wait until 29 November, when a meeting was scheduled in Vilnius between EU leaders and Janukovyč, which had originally been planned for the signing of the AA. The first official statement was released four days after the Ukrainian rejection, on 25 November. In a brief statement, the presidents of the European Council and the European Commission, Herman van Rompuy and José Manuel Barroso, declared that everything now depended solely on Ukraine itself, as the EU would not withdraw its offer.⁶⁸ Although they recognised — and condemned — the aggressive influence that Russia was exerting on the country, and they also expressed their support for the protestors, they conceded that the EU would not force Ukraine to sign the agreements. In short, the conclusion of the AA was only in Ukraine's hands.



Figure 2. Protesters in Kyiv waving Ukrainian and European flags.

Source: <https://www.dw.com/en/maidan/t-38238015>.

⁶⁶ Interfax-Ukraine, "Ukraine's Employers Federation: Russia's customs service halts all Ukrainian imports". *Kyiv Post*, 14 August 2013.

⁶⁷ Yuriy Shveda and Joung Ho Park, "Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity: The Dynamics of Euromaidan", *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 7, no. 1 (January 2016): 85–91.

⁶⁸ "Joint statement by President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy and President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso on Ukraine". *European Council*, Brussels, 25 Novembre 2013.

When the Vilnius meeting finally took place, Janukovyč did not take a step back, as he officially distanced himself from the EU's influence, much to the disappointment of all European leaders. This caused an irreparable fracture in their relationships with his regime. From 30 November onwards, public support for the protesters, whose number grew exponentially in the span of just ten days, became the norm in EU statements. Moreover, the violent crackdown by Ukrainian authorities further isolated Janukovyč. The term "unjustified" was first used by the EU to describe his actions as early as 30 November, immediately after 35 protesters were injured by Kyiv authorities.⁶⁹

Yet, no concrete action was taken against these violations of fundamental European rights, and the EU remained hesitant in these critical moments, failing to exert its actorness along its eastern borders.⁷⁰ Through December, the European Union maintained this position by constantly reminding to Janukovyč that it was still ready to sign the AA if Ukraine agreed to comply, and by calling for an end to violence against protesters.⁷¹ As such, an important memo issued on 12 December defined the Agreement as "an offer to the country and its people", as the EU sought to take advantage of the momentum brought by Euromaidan.⁷² It made clear that the AA and the DCFTA would provide exponential benefits to the nation, such as a foundation for future relations with the EU, including a more favourable access to its markets, and a solution to the ongoing crisis, without which the signing would not take place. All of it, however, was not enough to influence Janukovyč, who remained under Putin's influence: the threats issued by Russia were far more persuasive than the promises of the EU. As a consequence, the first two months of Euromaidan were inconclusive for Brussels, and it seemed that the EU had lost most of the influence it had managed to gain in the past twenty years.

Things suddenly escalated in February 2014, when the scale of the protests reached its highest level, leading to the police opening fire against the crowd in Kyiv and killing 26 protestors. Four days later, on 22 February, president Janukovyč fled to Russia.⁷³ These events were finally followed by a stronger response from the EU, which issued a twenty-seven-article resolution in

⁶⁹ "JOINT STATEMENT by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Štefan Füle on last night's events in Ukraine". *European Commission*, Brussels, 30 November 2013.

⁷⁰ Taras Kuzio, "European Identity, Euromaidan, and Ukrainian Nationalism", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 22, no. 4 (October 2016): 497–508.

⁷¹ "Results of the phone conversation between President Barroso and President Yanukovich of Ukraine". *European Commission*, Brussels, 8 December 2013.

⁷² "EU-Ukraine: Association Agreement is an offer to the country and its people". *European Commission*, Brussels, 12 December 2013.

⁷³ Olga Zelinska, "Ukrainian Euromaidan Protest: Dynamics, Causes, and Aftermath", *Sociology Compass* 11, no. 9 (September 2017): 2.

which it directly condemned Janukovyč and his parliament, holding him responsible for the murders.⁷⁴ Deep condolences were extended to the victims' families, as politicians in Brussels began to become aware of the significance of Euromaidan: the demonstrators were not just fighting for Ukraine, but for the European Union itself, even without being part of it. It was the first time in history that people had died for the Union's flag, and everyone was expecting an assertive reaction.⁷⁵ This came in that same resolution, as Article 24 stated that the AA and the DCFTA were no longer the final goals for EU-Ukraine cooperation, but further steps could and had to be done. So far, this was the most powerful response given by Brussels. Yet, it was still deemed insufficient, especially after the rapid escalation of events in Crimea, as many commentators saw the European reaction to Russia's military aggression as nothing more than abstract words of "deep concerns".⁷⁶

Despite the aggressive Russian intervention in Crimea, by March Ukraine had gained a renewed political stability, as a new pro-European government was formed immediately after Janukovyč's fleeing. Favourable diplomatic talks resumed, and by 21 March the AA was finally signed. In Brussels, short before the signing, van Rompuy paid homage to the people of Euromaidan, and assured the EU's commitment to social and economic reforms in Ukraine, although stressing that it was "not an easy road".⁷⁷ The Agreement itself recognised Ukraine as an European nation, both historically and in terms of values, and it favourably welcomed its aspirations for a democratic way of life. It offered aid to support its economy in trade, industry and transport, and it provided the bases for a reform of justice needed to grant the EU membership.⁷⁸

Still, Ukraine remained within Russia's grip. Europe could not have responded to Euromaidan the same way as Putin, as it lacked a powerful and coordinated army. If some steps were made in the direction wanted by Brussels, the most important being the removal of Janukovyč, at the same time a lot had to be conceded to Moscow, which by March had seized significant parts of Ukrainian territory. The EU only had political leverage over the Verkhovna Rada, given the unprecedented support it gained in the previous months, but it was not enough to establish its actorness over Ukraine. Russia was still winning.

⁷⁴ "Resolution on the situation in Ukraine". *European Parliament*, 27 February 2014.

⁷⁵ Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, "Euromaidan: Time to Draw Conclusions", *European View* 13, no. 1 (June 2014): 11–20.

⁷⁶ Saryusz-Wolski.

⁷⁷ "Statement by President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy at the occasion of the signing ceremony of the political provisions of the Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine". *European Council*, Brussels, 21 March 2014.

⁷⁸ "EU–Ukraine Association Agreement". *European Commission*, Brussels, 21 March 2014.

2.3 EU-Ukraine relations during the war in Donbas (2014-2022)

Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity offered Russia a justification to invade and occupy the Crimean Peninsula and Sevastopol in a well-coordinated military operation at the end of February 2014, to which Ukraine could not offer any kind of organised resistance. The European Union perceived this as a threat far more serious than the authoritarian attempts to seize power by Janukovyč, as this time the very foundations of the EU were put at risk: if it was not able to defend a nation that was fighting for its right to be a part of it, it would have lost all of its credibility. As such, a stronger response was to be expected.

Initially, however, it did not happen. At the same time as the invasion, Russia launched an effective disinformation campaign, and for the first few months European leaders were busy debating whether an actual occupation was in fact underway.⁷⁹ When President Barroso first spoke about the events, the day after the attack, he referred to them as “tensions in Crimea”, a term that does not suggest the presence of Russian soldiers.⁸⁰ The violation of Ukrainian sovereignty was officially recognised the following day, when he directly condemned Russia and offered Kyiv the full support of the EU.⁸¹ In that same speech he stressed the need for Europe to follow a “new narrative”, one in which it could be a leader in promoting its core values throughout the world, and the defence of Ukraine had to be the first step. It was the first time since the start of Euromaidan that an EU leader depicted Russia as the aggressor nation, contributing to increasing the support for Kyiv.

It arrived after the Crimean referendum of 16 March, which the EU immediately recognised as illegitimate, and imposed its first sanctions against Moscow to punish the illegal annexation. Van Rompuy remarked that the goal was to halt any Russian operation in Crimea and to bring back Kyiv’s sovereignty.⁸² That same day, the Council of the European Union assessed the need to solve the crisis, and proposed acting as a mediator, so as to avoid “a negative spiral” of events.⁸³ Still, its full support remained solely in favour of Ukraine.

⁷⁹ Timothy Snyder, “The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America”. Crown, 2018, p. 108.

⁸⁰ “President Barroso’s phone call with the Prime-Minister of Ukraine Arseniy Yatseniuk”. *European Commission*, Brussels, 28 February 2014, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_14_40.

⁸¹ José Manuel Durão Barroso, “Tearing down walls – building bridges”. *European Commission*, Berlin, 1 March 2014, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_14_168.

⁸² “EU strengthens sanctions against actions undermining Ukraine’s territorial integrity”. *Council of the European Union*, Brussels, 21 March 2014.

⁸³ “Council conclusions on Ukraine”. *Council of the European Union*, Brussels, 21 March 2014.

Such measures, however, did not contribute to ending the hostilities, as by April Russian-supported militias were fighting against the Ukrainians in Donbas. This new conflict was the ultimate signal of the EU's failure in its approach to Ukraine, as its continuous underestimation of Russian intentions led it to be completely unprepared for this war. Sanctions proved to be only half-solutions that did not address the causes of the crisis, and could not therefore offer the leverage Europe was hoping for.⁸⁴ In April new financial and trade measures were adopted to support Kyiv, which was encouraged to continue its path of internal reforms, and new words of disapproval were directed against Moscow, with little success.⁸⁵ Never before 2014 it had been so clear that the EU did not have the power to protect Ukraine, as it completely lacked the actorness to influence its borders with Russia. The war, therefore, did not stop.

For the next seven years, the eastern borders of Ukraine would be ravaged by the conflict. Throughout these years, the EU never stopped offering its support both politically and economically, but without managing to overcome Russia. Yet, despite the internal conflicts in the Union, during the entire conflict there was a constant increase in sanctions and economic measures for Kyiv which, although insufficient for long-term results, were enough to freeze the fighting into a stalemate by early 2015.⁸⁶ This was the first major achievement secured by the EU on the battlefield. By then, the EU was finally able to provide a concrete action plan to manage the crisis, which was presented in Kyiv on 18 March 2015.⁸⁷ In it, the future steps that Ukraine would have to take in order to enhance its partnership with the Union were detailed, from its internal reforms and the review of its constitution to its fight against corruption. Moreover, stronger economic ties were established at the 17th EU-Ukraine Summit of 27 April 2015, further integrating Ukraine into the European sphere of influence.⁸⁸ All of these manoeuvres inadvertently shifted the power equilibrium in Eastern Europe, which began to gradually lose Russian influence. Using its economic leverage, the EU was actually able to present itself as a better alternative to the Kremlin. Its lack of military power pushed Brussels to find different ways to exert its actorness, and it found

⁸⁴ Neil Kent and Vsevolod Samokhvalov, "The Ukraine crisis: a Russian–European cold war?", *Journal of Intelligence and Terrorism Studies* 1 (13 June 2016): 1–12.

⁸⁵ "Council conclusions on Ukraine". *Council of the European Union*, Brussels, 14 April 2014.

⁸⁶ Ingmar Oldberg, "The Long War in Donbas: Causes and Consequences", *The Swedish Institute of International Affairs*, 2020.

⁸⁷ "Action Plan for Ukraine 2015 – 2017 - Document prepared by the Office of the Directorate General for Programmes". *GR-DEM Rapporteur Group on Democracy*, Kyiv, 9 January 2015.

⁸⁸ "17th EU-Ukraine Summit: Joint Statement". *European Council*, Kyiv, 27 April 2015.

the solution through its market power. The EU, in short, unintentionally acted as a great power, and was able to influence Ukraine even without the threat of war.⁸⁹

The events of 2014 profoundly changed the EU's approach to Eastern Europe, as it realised that it had not been able to prevent them from happening. This forced it to consider its necessity to act as a major power if it did not want to lose its influence over Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia that it had built over the last twenty years. The EU-Ukraine Summit became an annual occurrence, and it was used to extend Brussels support to the Ukrainian army, with the aim of gradually building an efficient military force that had the means to fight Russia alone. Slowly, the issue of security on its eastern border drove the EU to abandon its policies of conciliation and paved the way for a "post-post-Cold War Europe", in which relations with Russia were gradually replaced by improved ties with former Soviet European republics, with the exception of Belarus.⁹⁰

With these new policies, however, Europe would inadvertently spiral Ukraine into a full-scale war with Russia, which most of Western politicians failed to foresee. Yet, the shift of political and economic interest in the region moved Putin to intervene again against Kyiv, with the aim of reestablishing the leverage he had progressively been losing in Eastern Europe, and of definitively countering NATO's expansion towards Russian borders.⁹¹ War broke out again, as Europe failed for a second time to anticipate the consequences of its Ukrainian policies.

2.4 EU-Ukraine relations during the Russian invasion (2022-2024)

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine began on 24 February 2022. Europe — but, more generally, the West — was not prepared for an escalation of this level, as it continued to deny the possibility of Russian military actions until 21 February, when Putin formally recognised the Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states.⁹² Any attempt to avoid war was met with silence, and the packages of sanctions imposed on prominent Russian individuals "in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine"

⁸⁹ Thomas Gehring, Kevin Urbanski, and Sebastian Oberthür, "The European Union as an Inadvertent Great Power: EU Actorness and the Ukraine Crisis", *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 55, no. 4 (July 2017): 727–43.

⁹⁰ Derek Averre and Kataryna Wolczuk, "Introduction: The Ukraine Crisis and Post-Post-Cold War Europe", *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 4 (20 April 2016): 551–55.

⁹¹ Olha Hordiichuk, "The Ideological and Ontological Causes of Russia's War on Ukraine. West versus East; Tyranny versus Democracy", *Ethics in Progress* 14, no. 1 (31 July 2023): 4–23.

⁹² Vladislav Fedorenko and Maksym Fedorenko, "Russia's Military Invasion of Ukraine in 2022: Aim, Reasons, and Implications", *Krytyka Prawa* 14, no. 1 (15 March 2022): 26.

served little to no avail.⁹³ On 23 February, the day before the invasion, the EU prohibited any economic relation with the two separatist regions, thus reaffirming Ukraine's sovereignty over them, in an identical approach to the Crimean crisis.⁹⁴

The invasion triggered a firm response from Brussels, and for the first time all of the Union's member states agreed on the need to support Ukraine. Stronger sanctions were launched against the Kremlin, hitting several sectors of its economy, while most of Europe began to gradually detach itself from its Russian imports.⁹⁵ Moreover, the unexpected Ukrainian resistance against the larger and better equipped Russian army allowed the EU to strengthen its position and continue to send more of its equipment and macro-financial assistance to support the defence of Kyiv as early as 24 February. These reactions demonstrated a further increase in EU actorness, although only within the field of defence.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, this allowed Ukraine to halt Putin's offensive and take back control over most of its north-eastern territories by April.

Yet, the greatest advantage that Kyiv gained from the invasion was being granted the candidate status for EU membership, after submitting a formal request for an accelerated accession process on 28 February, which was welcomed by most EU leaders. On 17 June the European Commission urged the European Council to provide Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia with candidate status, while Ursula von der Leyen remarked that they all shared a "strong and legitimate aspiration of joining the European Union" and that "they belong, in due time, to the European Union".⁹⁷ Regarding Ukraine, the Commission highlighted the progress that the nation had made since 2014, recognising that the path it was following proved the goodwill of its intention to become a member state. In the official report published by the Commission, the Ukrainian government was praised for its "remarkable level of institutional strength, determination and ability to function".⁹⁸ The word "resilience" was used seven times to describe the spirit of both the government and its

⁹³ "Council implementing Regulation (EU) No 269/2014 concerning restrictive measures in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine". *Council of the European Union*, Brussels, 8 February 2022.

⁹⁴ "COUNCIL DECISION concerning restrictive measures in response to the recognition of the non-government controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine and the ordering of Russian armed forces into those areas". *Council of the European Union*, Brussels, 23 February 2022.

⁹⁵ Giselle Bosse, "Values, Rights, and Changing Interests: The EU's Response to the War against Ukraine and the Responsibility to Protect Europeans", *Contemporary Security Policy* 43, no. 3 (3 July 2022): 535–36.

⁹⁶ Oriol Costa and Esther Barbé, "A Moving Target. EU Actorness and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine", *Journal of European Integration* 45, no. 3 (3 April 2023): 431–46.

⁹⁷ "The European Commission recommends to Council confirming Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia's perspective to become members of the EU and provides its opinion on granting them candidate status". *European Commission*, Brussels, 17 June 2022.

⁹⁸ "Commission Opinion on Ukraine's application for membership of the European Union". *European Commission*, Brussels, 17 June 2022.

people in opposing the Russian army. A week later, on 23 June, the Council approved its conclusive report which unanimously granted candidate status for both Ukraine and Moldova (Article 11); the document adopted the same rhetoric used by Von der Leyen.⁹⁹ The speed of this process, just under four months, was remarkable. For Ukraine, it signalled a future oriented to the West, towards Brussels, while for the EU it represented the final step in its enlargement, even though it also meant continuing the war against Russia until one of the two sides renounced Donbas.

This decision also highlighted a crucial shift in European policies, as the Union, together with the United Kingdom, acted as a major global power, challenging Russian imperial claims over Eastern Europe and American hegemony in the West. As Raik et al. pointed out, this significant increase in its actorness is displayed by two factors, the decision to immediately recognise the conflict and its firm resolution to expand and defend its future borders, which were identified with the easternmost frontier of Ukraine.¹⁰⁰ These are the two main differences from its response in 2014 which, despite the adoption of sanctions against the Kremlin, did not alter the geopolitical equilibrium in Eastern Europe in any significant way, and effectively proved a European defeat in countering Russian expansionism. At the same time however, this response was still not enough to manifest the EU's hard power, as the EU did not have the capabilities — or the interest — to join the war at Kyiv's side and fighting against Russia.

The decision to offer Ukraine the prospect of applying for EU membership did not mean that it had to be granted to Zelenskyy. A year later, the European Commission published a 150-page report about the Union's enlargement policies towards Ukraine, in which the progress made by Kyiv were analysed in relation to its final goal of being a member state.¹⁰¹ The document highlighted the European aspirations of Ukraine and its people, stressing that EU membership had an approval rate of more than 90% in the war-torn nation, and expressed satisfaction with all the steps taken by the government despite the ongoing conflict, even though several others were still needed. Again, the word "resilience" appeared twenty-five times. Yet, there was no clear indication of when, or if, the application would take place; the document even lacked a concluding paragraph.

In fact, while all twenty-seven member states agreed on supporting Ukraine, not all of them shared the same stance regarding its membership. Divisions arose due to the dangers that further EU expansion eastwards could cause and the economic burden of supporting a nation ravaged by

⁹⁹ "European Council conclusions on Ukraine, the membership applications of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, Western Balkans and external relations, 23 June 2022". *European Council*, Brussels, 21 June 2022.

¹⁰⁰ Kristi Raik et al., "EU Policy towards Ukraine: Entering Geopolitical Competition over European Order", *The International Spectator* 59, no. 1 (2 January 2024): 39–58.

¹⁰¹ "Ukraine 2023 report". *European Commission*, Brussels, 8 November 2023.

years of conflict, with France, Germany and the Benelux countries expressing doubts over the matter.¹⁰² Moreover, the AA and the DCTFA were still seen as the most appropriate instruments to regulate EU-Ukraine relations during the crisis. Such an approach proved a lack of strategy on the part of the EU itself. The haste that led to the approval of Ukraine and Moldova's applications in June 2022 was a sign of the agitation that followed the full-scale invasion, and of the need to give a firm response that directly challenged Russia. At the same time, the lack of an end date for these applications may also be the result of a pragmatic strategy by the EU, which uses the possibility of membership as a pacifying instrument in its bordering regions, without having to actually commit to the defence of these territories.¹⁰³ The EU, in fact, wants peace, and accepting Ukraine would not guarantee it.

The last notable event before 7 November 2024 was the start of membership negotiations between Ukraine and the Union, agreed upon on 21 June of that same year, and entered into force four days later. Once more, it was assessed that "the future of Ukraine and its citizens lies within the European Union".¹⁰⁴ Yet, the process still seems far from being completed. The internal reforms required for Ukraine to act within EU laws will take years, and the threats of further Russian interventions loom in Kyiv's European future. Moreover, the fear among several EU member states of Russian reprisals is weakening the support for Ukraine's membership.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, immense progress has been made after the launch of the invasion, which ironically brought Ukraine much closer to the Union than it had expected, and vice versa: Brussels' commitment was unforeseen, especially after its reactions in 2014. Even if the future for Kyiv is still uncertain, the prospects of finally completing its Europeanisation process have increased exponentially.

2.5 Conclusion

Much has changed since the first protesters gathered at Maidan Square in Kyiv to demonstrate against Janukovyč's refusal to sign the AA. As this chapter shows, the EU's support for Ukraine underwent a gradual increase, and it is still following that direction. During the first months of clashes, it did not offer the Ukrainian people any significant support against their government, even

¹⁰² Guillaume Van der Loo and Peter Van Elsuwege, "The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement after Ukraine's EU Membership Application: Still Fit for Purpose", *Epc.Eu*, 17 March 2022.

¹⁰³ Veronica Anghel and Jelena Džankić, "Wartime EU: Consequences of the Russia – Ukraine War on the Enlargement Process", *Journal of European Integration* 45, no. 3 (3 April 2023): 487–501.

¹⁰⁴ "EU opens accession negotiations with Ukraine". *European Council*, Brussels, 25 June 2024.

¹⁰⁵ Liesbet Hooghe et al., "The Russian Threat and the Consolidation of the West: How Populism and EU-Skepticism Shape Party Support for Ukraine", *European Union Politics* 25, no. 3 (September 2024): 459–82.

if it was eventually removed. Thus many protestors felt abandoned by the Europe they were looking for. As long as the matter was only internal to Ukraine, the EU did not expose itself, paving the way for Russian involvement in the annexation of Crimea, and the subsequent war in Donbas. As the primary sources used in this chapter illustrate, there have been strong condemnations from Brussels, but weak concrete actions were taken to support Kyiv. Sanctions that were imposed on the Kremlin did not end the conflict, and were not enough to support the still inefficient Ukrainian army in regaining control over its territories. Even so, it slowly pushed the two sides closer together, and in the span of seven years Ukraine made continuous progress for its EU membership, which was vividly shared by Brussels as well. The first phase of the war in Donbas gave Europe the chance to slowly enhance its actorness over the continent, as the continuous dialogues with Ukraine and the disregard of Russian threats demonstrate.

The most significant progress, however, has been made after the full-scale invasion of 2022, as by that time the EU felt compelled to defend Kyiv with sufficient force to drive the Russians off. Even if it eventually did not prove to be the case, despite the initial successes, this decision signalled that relations between the two sides had become irrevocable. The EU could not have renounced Ukraine, and vice versa. Granting Kyiv the right to apply for EU membership was the final step of a process which began thirty years before with the signing of the PCA. It was also the result of a gradual change in Ukraine's internal policies to match those of the Union, even though this process is far from being completed, and it demonstrated how the relations between them went from almost indifference during 2013-2014 to complete interdependence.¹⁰⁶

The war in Ukraine allowed the EU to act as a major power on par with the US, and it proved it could challenge Russia even without its hard power. It was able to halt the invasion and avoid a quick capitulation of Kyiv, concurrently fostering its actorness and virtually expanding its borders with the preliminary inclusion of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia into its sphere of influence. For these reasons, even if Ukraine emerges weakened by the conflict, its ties with the EU, which have been considered its priority since its independence, will be strengthened.

¹⁰⁶ Heidi Maurer, Richard G Whitman, and Nicholas Wright, "The EU and the Invasion of Ukraine: A Collective Responsibility to Act?", *International Affairs* 99, no. 1 (9 January 2023): 219–38.

US POLICIES VIS-À-VIS UKRAINE

[2013-2024]

This chapter examines the evolution of American relations with Ukraine, from the start of the Euromaidan uprisings in late November 2013, to the end of the presidential elections in 2024, when, on 7 November, American citizens chose to re-elect Donald J. Trump as their president for a second term. The research question, therefore, is: “How did the policies of the US vis-à-vis Ukraine evolve, 2013-2024?”. After a brief introduction, the following subchapters will each cover a specific period from this time frame: the Euromaidan crisis, the Russian invasion of Crimea and the war in Donbas, and the total war of 2022, thus mirroring the structure of *Chapter Two*.

As mentioned in *Chapter One*, the American policies discussed in this chapter will follow the concept of *hegemony* as outlined by Brian C. Schmidt, who gave a broad definition combining realist, liberal and constructivist perspectives.¹⁰⁷ In short, this chapter will consider the capacity of the US to maintain significant material power and to impose its will upon foreign sovereign nations — in this case Ukraine, the EU, and also Russia. The results will show how Ukraine became a battleground for American hegemony against Russia, and that over the past decade the strategic partnership between Washington and Kyiv has gradually strengthened. However, unlike with EU membership, the US has never been completely ready to support Ukraine’s integration into NATO.

3.1 Introduction

When Ukraine gained its independence from the USSR in 1991, the main US interests in its territory were not economic or political, but military. In fact, the primary concern of President George H. W. Bush was the presence of former Soviet nuclear weapons on Ukrainian soil, and the threat they posed to global security. Only after protracted and exhausting rounds of negotiations did Ukraine agree to sign the Treaty of Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 1994. In exchange it was endowed with security guarantees from Russia, the US and the UK, as outlined in the Budapest Memorandum on 5 December that same year. It was the first major deal between Kyiv and

¹⁰⁷ Schmidt, "Hegemony: A Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis and Its Application to the Debate on American Hegemony".

Washington, and it committed the latter to defend Ukrainian territorial integrity and to provide assistance in case of aggression.¹⁰⁸

The US immediately understood the geopolitical importance of Ukraine, located between Russia and Western Europe, which allowed America to indirectly halt any further expansionist move by the Kremlin, if it exerted its hegemony over the nation. For these reasons, during the 1990s Kyiv had productive relations with Washington, and it became the third largest recipient of US foreign aid during the decade.¹⁰⁹ In September 1996 President Kuchma and US Vice-President Al Gore defined the relations between their nations as a “strategic partnership”, a term that would be consistently adopted throughout the following years.¹¹⁰

Ukraine saw its improved relations with the West as the best opportunity to safeguard its territorial integrity, and by the early 2000s it began discussing its membership in NATO.¹¹¹ As for the other former Soviet republics, being part of international alliances like NATO or the EU became a priority; the path was however more difficult for Kyiv, given Russia’s opposition to any further expansion of Western coalitions towards its borders. The most significant event in this matter was the Bucharest NATO summit (April 2008), which stated that Ukraine (and Georgia) “will be NATO members in the future”.¹¹² However, no clear date was set, and Kyiv was not granted any membership candidacy. It was, in short, a vague statement, and Ukrainians overestimated its importance. Moreover, the election of Janukovyč in 2010 further hindered the matter, as he favoured a state of neutrality for his nation.¹¹³

3.2 US-Ukraine relations during Euromaidan (2013-2014)

For most of his two presidencies, Barack Obama did not consider Eastern Europe to be the main security concern for his nation. Ukraine, together with Georgia and Moldova, had been put aside as the US attention shifted towards the Middle East, where it was fighting the Islamic State. Only when Janukovyč refused to sign the Association Agreement with the EU did Washington become alerted

¹⁰⁸ “Memorandum on security assurances in connection with Ukraine’s accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons”. *United Nations Treaty Collection*, no. 52241, Budapest, 5 December 1994.

¹⁰⁹ Robert G. Rodriguez et al., “US-Ukraine Relations In The Post-Soviet Era”, *European Scientific Journal*, 26 February 2016, 395–438.

¹¹⁰ “U.S.-Ukraine Relations”. *Bureau of European and Canadian Affairs*, US Department of State, 18 June 1997.

¹¹¹ Tor Bukkvoll, “Ukraine and NATO: The Politics of Soft Cooperation”, *Security Dialogue* 28, no. 3 (September 1997): 363–74.

¹¹² “Bucharest Summit declaration”. *North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*, Article 23, Bucharest, 3 April 2008.

¹¹³ Taras Kuzio, “Russianization of Ukrainian National Security Policy under Viktor Yanukovych”, *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 25, no. 4 (October 2012): 558–81.

and began monitoring the situation more closely, even though it was not directly involved in these negotiations. A press release was immediately issued on 21 November 2013, announcing Washington's disappointment with the decision to turn down such an "historical opportunity", and stating that "the United States is convinced Ukraine's integration with Europe is the surest course to economic prosperity and democracy".¹¹⁴ It was the first report on Ukraine that the US Department of State released in over four months, given that the previous one was issued on 11 July.

It was difficult for the US to give Ukraine the credit it deserved within its foreign relations. After all, the American public had still not familiarised itself with a nation that had existed for just more than two decades, and it failed to comprehend how internal protests there could have harmed American hegemony in Europe. Moreover, it was considered a "European" issue, and the US was initially not intentioned to be involved in protests in favour of Brussels. This first reaction was the result of what Taras Kuzio defined as "Ukraine fatigue", the West's diminishment of support due to the pro-Russian policies of Janukovyč.¹¹⁵

Yet, as soon as the first police clashes with the protesters began to be reported, the US was quick to change its plans and align with Europe. In a speech with Janukovyč, Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland was direct in mentioning that Washington considered his policies for handling the crisis "absolutely impermissible in an European state", and that it was a priority for his nation to bring back democratic rule if he wanted to maintain future relations with the West.¹¹⁶ By December 2013, US support for the Maidan protesters was not driven by politics anymore, but by idealism. Nuland continuously remarked that siding with them meant siding with democratic values, as Euromaidan was a fight for justice and civil rights rather than an effort to topple Janukovyč. Congress therefore agreed that it was imperative to take Ukraine forward, and support the Maidan crowd "in these historic and challenging times for the [...] Ukrainian-American relationship".¹¹⁷ Thus, an official bipartisan resolution was issued by the Senate (S. RES. 319), which directly delegitimised Janukovyč and framed the US as a protector of democracy in Ukraine.¹¹⁸ For the first

¹¹⁴ Jen Psaki, "Ukraine's Decision on Association with the EU". Press release, *US Department of State*, Washington DC, 21 November 2013.

¹¹⁵ Taras Kuzio, "Ukraine's Relations with the West since the Orange Revolution", *European Security* 21, no. 3 (September 2012): 395–413.

¹¹⁶ Victoria Nuland, "Readout of Assistant Secretary of State for European and European Affairs Victoria Nuland's Discussions with President Yanukovich in Ukraine". Taken question, *US Department of State*, Washington DC, 11 December 2013.

¹¹⁷ Victoria Nuland, "Remarks at the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation Conference". Remarks, *US Department of State*, Washington DC, 13 December 2013.

¹¹⁸ "S.Res.319 - A resolution expressing support for the Ukrainian people in light of President Yanukovich's decision not to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union". *Congress.GOV*, Washington DC, 13 December 2013.

time Washington took a clear stance in favour of Kyiv, suggesting that it was ready to impose sanctions to pressure the government to back down, even if it meant standing against Russia.

By early 2014 the US support for Euromaidan was indisputable. It is worth noting, though, that it was framed as humanitarian support, as Washington was not aligned with the government of Kyiv, but with the protesters that were fighting against it. When asked why they were so interested in the outcome of the protests, Nuland responded, "Because these same principles and values are the cornerstone of all free democracies, and America supports them in every country on the planet".¹¹⁹ By referring to "principles and values", Nuland meant "basic human dignity and justice, clean and accountable government, and economic and political independence of Ukraine".¹²⁰ Politically, however, the US only condemned Janukovyč's refusal to sign the AA and to align Ukraine with the EU. It did not push for any significant shift in Ukrainian policies, like a resumption of talks for NATO membership: throughout the entire Euromaidan protests a military deal was never mentioned, a sign that the events were not perceived by the West as a threat to its security. In short, America wanted for Ukraine a future in the EU, not in NATO.¹²¹

Yet, Euromaidan also played a fundamental role in shifting American attention back to Europe, after it had been mainly focused on the Middle East since the start of the Arab Spring.¹²² If, during 2013, the US Department of State issued only ten press releases involving Ukraine, six of which came after November 2013, in 2014 the total number of remarks rose to forty-three. At the same time, solely during Euromaidan, Vice President Biden made nine phone calls to Janukovyč.¹²³ The protests, therefore, pushed the US to slowly increase its diplomatic influence in Eastern Europe, which gradually expanded over the following decade. Just like the EU however, Washington was still not ready to commit fully to the region, and despite the praise it got from Ukrainian protesters when Nuland visited Kyiv in December and January, it did not act decisively enough to prevent the Russian interventions of 2014. By then, the US had come to realise that Janukovyč had weakened its hegemony in the region, and allowed the Kremlin to replace it.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Victoria Nuland, "Implications of the Crisis in Ukraine". Testimony, *US Department of State*, Washington DC, 15 January 2014.

¹²⁰ Victoria Nuland, "Implications", 2014.

¹²¹ Ștefania-Teodora Cocor, 'A Partnership in Time of Crisis: U.S. - Ukraine Relations during the Obama Administration', *Euro-Atlantic Studies* 6 (2023): 7–44.

¹²² Nicholas Bouchet, "The Democracy Tradition in US Foreign Policy and the Obama Presidency", *International Affairs* 89, no. 1 (January 2013): 31–51.

¹²³ The Associated Press, "Biden, Yanukovich Spoke 9 Times in 3 Months, Source Tells AP", *NBC News*, 25 February 2014.

¹²⁴ Andreas Kappeler, "Ukraine and Russia: Legacies of the Imperial Past and Competing Memories", *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 5, no. 2 (July 2014): 115.

3.3 US-Ukraine relations during the War in Donbas (2014-2022)

Up until the peak of Euromaidan, in February 2014, the American reaction to what was happening in Ukraine was weak, and limited to words of support for the protesters. Moreover, the most important voice in US politics, President Barack Obama, had yet to publicly address the events. However, the Russian occupation of Crimea caused a complete shift in his European policies, and from 2014 onwards Europe returned to being a key theatre for US security. It was the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union that American hegemony in Europe was challenged, as through its actions Russia was trying to re-establish the global order that was dismantled at the end of the Cold War.¹²⁵

Obama's first words came on 28 February, the day after Russia sent its first troops to occupy the Supreme Council of Crimea. He immediately condemned the aggression, and advocated for an end to hostilities through diplomacy. Moreover, he stated that "in this difficult moment the United States supports his [*Oleksandr Turchynov, Janukovyč's acting successor*] government's efforts and stands for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and democratic future of Ukraine".¹²⁶ The following day, Secretary of State John Kerry labelled the occupation of Crimea an "invasion" and declared that any future negotiations would not take place without the Ukrainian government.¹²⁷

With the crisis unfolding, the Obama administration immediately began seeking for a diplomatic solution to end it. The President agreed that it was essential to grant Kyiv enough resources to counter the Kremlin's influence, and to do that it was necessary for the two countries to repair the relations that Janukovyč had severed. Obama's strategy was based upon four key points: immediate economic support with a loan of one billion dollars to sustain Kyiv's economy, an increase of sanctions and pressure against Russia, the reinforcement of NATO border nations (Poland and the Baltics) to deter further Russian attacks, and supporting dialogue between Kyiv and Moscow.¹²⁸

In addition, on 3 April Congress issued the Support for the Sovereignty, Integrity, Democracy, and Economic Stability of Ukraine Act, and a second bill with the same name (S. 2124), to regulate the policies the US should adopt towards Kyiv. In addition to the previous four points, these measures emphasised the need to enhance the cooperation with the EU, UN, and NATO to provide

¹²⁵ Michael O. Slobodchikoff, "Challenging US Hegemony: The Ukrainian Crisis and Russian Regional Order", *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 44, no. 1 (11 January 2017): 76–95.

¹²⁶ Barack Obama, "Statement of the President on Ukraine". *The White House*, Washington DC, 28 February 2014.

¹²⁷ John Kerry, "Situation in Ukraine". Press statement, *US Department of State*, Washington DC, 1 March 2014.

¹²⁸ William J. Burns, "Syria Spillover: The Growing Threat of Terrorism and Sectarianism in the Middle East and Ukraine Update". Testimony, *US Department of State*, Washington DC, 6 March 2014.

assistance to Ukraine.¹²⁹ The documents also underlined the importance of signing the AA for Kyiv, while the possibility of granting NATO membership was not included.

Obama's reactions to the events in Crimea were not directly targeted against Russia, as he was still hoping that the crisis would end positively. His expectations, however, were shattered when Russian-backed forces began fighting the Ukrainian government in Donbas. This time the American response was the opposite, as it targeted Russia with harsher economic sanctions, while offering Ukraine only limited support, so as to avoid further escalation. Obama himself admitted that the American people were giving priority to domestic issues rather than Ukraine.¹³⁰ For this reason, Obama failed to end the hostilities. He expressed his support for Ukraine's EU membership after the signing the AA, but he did not want to involve the US in a fight with Russia. As such, he ruled out the possibility of Kyiv joining NATO as well.¹³¹

Publicly however, he never denied Ukraine the backing of the United States. A discourse analysis of his speeches in 2014 shows that he attributed negative sentiments to Russia, while Ukraine was always associated with positive emotions to reinforce trust in the West.¹³² The same rhetoric was adopted in the G7 Summit Declaration of June 2014, the first to take place without Russia: Western leaders reaffirmed their full support for Ukraine and Poroshenko's new government, and they all offered to fund Kyiv's economic development.

By 2015 the conflict had bogged down, and so had the American interests in the region. Compared to the forty-three remarks of the Department of State towards Ukraine in 2014, the following year saw only twenty-six, and in 2016 they even dropped to ten.¹³³ The election of Donald Trump as President did not help, as he was far more supportive of Russia than his predecessor. But the decrease in Russian pressure also allowed Kyiv to pursue its foreign policies objectives more freely, above all, EU and NATO membership. Thus, military dialogues with the US were continued by Poroshenko. In June 2017 the Verkhovna Rada declared NATO membership a priority, which was introduced into the constitution in 2019.¹³⁴ These dialogues were enhanced by the following

¹²⁹ "Support for the Sovereignty, Integrity, Democracy, and Economic Stability of Ukraine Act of 2014". *US Government Publishing Office*, Washington DC, 3 April 2014.

¹³⁰ Peter Baker, "In Cold War Echo Obama Strategy Writes Off Putin". *New York Times*, 20 April 2014.

¹³¹ Deborah Welch Larson, "Outsourced Diplomacy: The Obama Administration and the Ukraine Crisis", in *Triangular Diplomacy among the United States, the European Union, and the Russian Federation*, ed. by Vicki L. Birchfield and Alasdair R. Young (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 55–76.

¹³² Vicky Tchapanian, "A critical analysis of speeches by President Vladimir Putin and President Barack Obama concerning the Crimean events", *Foreign Languages in Higher Education* 20, no. 1-2 (20) (19 May 2016): 31–38.

¹³³ US Department of State, "Ukraine: Remarks", 2014-2016, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/eur/ci/up/c34194.htm>.

¹³⁴ Lesya Alexiyevets and Mykola Alexiyevets, "Ukraine - the NATO: mutual relations and partnership main stages", *Східноєвропейський історичний вісник* 0, no. 14 (13 March 2020): 175–89.

presidents of both countries, Biden and Zelenskyy. The latter often visited NATO headquarters, and maintained constant relations with the Organisation, expressing on several occasions the desire for his nation to receive a NATO membership application. By 2021 relations between the USA, NATO and Ukraine were optimal, and significant progress had been made, even though it was still minimal when compared to the EU accession programme.¹³⁵

The events that unfolded in Ukraine after Euromaidan forced the US to focus its attention on Europe at a time when Russia was already challenging its hegemony in Syria.¹³⁶ This led Washington to divert much of its foreign aid to the region, but not to a significant extent, as Kyiv had hoped. The support given was sufficient to reform the country economically and politically, but not militarily — Ukraine could not have the strength to reoccupy Crimea and Donbas. As such, even though the relations between the two nations had undeniably improved after the removal of Janukovyč, the possibility of becoming a NATO member state was still out of reach for Ukraine.

3.4 US-Ukraine relations during the Russian invasion (2022-2024)

The election of Biden as the President of the United States (2020) was welcomed by Kyiv, as it was expecting an increase in American support, given his pro-Ukrainian policies during his vice-presidency in the Obama administration. Zelenskyy, perhaps naively, commented that Biden “will really help strengthen relations, help settle the war in Donbas, and end the occupation of our territory”.¹³⁷ The primary goal of Washington became the reaffirmation of its transatlantic relations that Trump had weakened during his presidency, including the strategic partnership with Ukraine. However, when Putin began massing his armed forces on the Ukrainian border, the US was not prepared to counter that, as it had been mainly focused on China as a threat to its hegemony, and not Russia.

When the invasion came, on 24 February 2022, Biden remarked that he would impose the most severe sanctions against Russia, and that “the United States, together with our Allies and partners in Europe, will support the Ukrainian people as they defend their country”.¹³⁸ The 2022 State of the Union Address, held on 1 March, opened with praise for Ukraine and issued the same

¹³⁵ Aleksander Ksawery Olech, "Determinants for the International Security: Membership of Ukraine in NATO", *International Relations Review* 6 (2019): 1–22.

¹³⁶ Maxine David, "Russia's Challenge to US Hegemony and the Implications for Europe", in *American Hegemony and the Rise of Emerging Powers* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 198–215.

¹³⁷ Steven Pifer, "The Biden Presidency and Ukraine", *Stanford International Policy Review* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2020): 6–12.

¹³⁸ Toi Staff, "Full text of Biden's speech on Ukraine: 'Putin chose this war,' will pay the price". *The Times of Israel*, 25 February 2022.

message.¹³⁹ Consequently, Biden worked to strengthen NATO's deterrence: he was committed to avoiding a direct conflict with Russia, but at the same time he gave crucial importance to the defence of Ukraine. Moreover, he detailed the American policies towards the war in an essay published by the *New York Times* on 31 May. He opened it by highlighting how "America's goal is straightforward: We want to see a democratic, independent, sovereign and prosperous Ukraine with the means to deter and defend itself against further aggression".¹⁴⁰ He remarked the importance of strengthening the strategic partnership between the two nations, as he announced that the US would continue to send more military equipment and financial aid to Kyiv until Russia agreed to begin peace negotiations.



Figure 3. Biden and Zelenskyy shake hands during a bilateral meeting at NATO 75th anniversary summit (July 2024).

Source: <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/ukraine-gets-new-225-million-us-military-aid-after-biden-meets-zelenskyy>.

Despite the severe implications that a war of this scale had for the West, the US immediately understood the opportunities that it could offer them. In the wake of a new multipolar system, with America on one hand against China on the other, the alignment of Russia towards the latter was a frightening prospect to Washington. For this reason, the conflict in Ukraine gave Biden the

¹³⁹ "President Biden's State of the Union Address". *The White House*, Washington DC, 1 March 2022.

¹⁴⁰ Joseph R. Biden Jr., "President Biden: What America Will and Will Not Do in Ukraine". Guest essay, *The New York Times*, 31 May 2022.

opportunity to reinforce NATO and to push his allies to commit to increased military spending. In other words, Ukraine had become, in just a matter of weeks, a battleground that America wanted to use to maintain its hegemony over Europe and against Russia and China.¹⁴¹ This new NATO policy was stressed at the North Atlantic Council (NAC) meeting of 24 March 2022 in Brussels, where all thirty leaders of the Alliance declared their commitment to strengthen the eastern flank and to station more troops there to counter Russian influence.¹⁴² Ukraine, instead, received less attention.

Yet, the discourse around Ukrainian NATO membership gained more relevance after the launch of the invasion, following a similar rhetoric to its EU integration. While the military assistance from the Organisation to Kyiv was unanimous, however, the same cannot be said for the membership application, and even the US had internal doubts about its success.¹⁴³ Putin's war of aggression was successful in altering NATO's enlargement policy, at least on its eastern flank as both Ukraine and Georgia's candidacies stalled after 24 February. In fact, the new NATO approach to Kyiv, widely supported by the US, has been defined as "Anything-but-Article-5", meaning that the Organisation had to be ready to provide any necessary military assistance to Zelenskyy, as long as it would not drive it towards triggering Article 5 of its Treaty, which requires each of its members to defend their allies with any means if they are attacked by a foreign nation.¹⁴⁴ In short, NATO did not consider itself ready to sustain a direct conflict with Russia, and the price it had to pay was Ukraine's membership. Zelenskyy reacted by continuing to promote relations between his nation and the Organisation, so as to slowly convince the most undecided members to grant Ukraine a membership application in an undefined future. Yet, the prospect of Ukraine being part of NATO seems far more distant than that of joining the EU.

The US remained conscious of the importance that a Ukrainian victory would have for their hegemony in Europe. Having an aligned Ukraine back at its 1991 borders and integrated into the EU and NATO would force Russia to focus its foreign influence elsewhere, leaving the West in full control of the European continent. Conversely, losing Kyiv would undermine American influence in Europe, as it would be split between Russia and the EU.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, Washington's hegemony depends on the outcome of this conflict, and on Zelenskyy's victory over Putin. As the war dragged

¹⁴¹ Murat Güneylüoğlu, "Russia's invasion of Ukraine: the implications for the American hegemony", *Cogito – Multidisciplinary Research Journal* 14, no. 3 (September 2022).

¹⁴² "Statement by NATO Heads of State and Government". *North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*, Brussels, 24 March 2022.

¹⁴³ Liana Fix and Steven Keil, "NATO and Russia after the Invasion of Ukraine". *German Marshall Fund for the United States* (2022): 1–12.

¹⁴⁴ Irakli Sirbiladze, "Everything but Article 5: NATO-Georgia and NATO- Ukraine Relations amid the New Strategic Context", *Think Visegrad/Centre for Euro-Atlantic Integration and Democracy*, 2022, 1–27.

¹⁴⁵ George Spencer Terry, "Supporting Ukraine Is 'America First': A Neo-Realist Argument", 106–18.

on, the US remained anchored in supporting Ukraine, but it showed signs of hesitancy about the extent it was willing to do so. A Ukrainian victory would entail a high risk to pay, and Biden did not seem willing to accept such a hazard.

By late 2024, the war launched by Putin was still raging, and a quick end to the conflict was still considered implausible. In the electoral campaign, both candidates did not agree on how, or if, to support Ukraine: Biden's primary interest was a Ukrainian victory, while Trump's was to put an end to the war, no matter the cost. With the election of the latter, the evolution of US-Ukraine relations seems far more uncertain, and it will be difficult to predict which direction the conflict will take.

3.5 Conclusion

American relations with Ukraine over the last decade followed a different path from those with the EU. This may also be mainly due to the nature of the relations themselves, which were born out of pure strategic interests following the dissolution of the USSR rather than cultural similarities. Yet, this chapter shows a clear evolution in these relations after Euromaidan, with the US becoming more involved in Ukrainian affairs. While the approach to the nation was weak at the start of the protests, it increased after the Russian occupation of Crimea, when Obama felt the American hegemony was being threatened. Washington saw the opportunity to align Ukraine to counter Russian expansionism, so it began improving ties between the two nations. Initially, however, the primary objective was to push Kyiv towards the European Union, not the USA, as demonstrated by the refusal to allow a NATO membership.

With the election of Donald Trump, American interests in Ukraine diminished. The support for Kyiv remained constant, but it did not increase at the same rate as the Russian pressure in Donbass: without a change in policies, it would have been impossible for Poroshenko, and later Zelenskyy, to regain control over their lost lands. Only in the wake of the full-scale invasion did the US' attention return to Eastern Europe, and Ukraine regained the interest it lost during the previous years, as Biden could not tolerate a loss of influence in the area.¹⁴⁶ In a matter of weeks Washington became a key partner for Kyiv, and the strategic partnership between them reached its highest importance, with the aim to halt Putin's offensive. NATO membership talks resumed, but by

¹⁴⁶ Robert Kagan, "A Free World, If You Can Keep It: Ukraine and American Interests", *Foreign Affairs* 102, no. 1 (February 2023): 39–53.

November 2024 no agreement had been reached for the foreseeable future. The two nations remain deeply intertwined, and the US' decision to continue to support Zelenskyy or to withdraw will have a profound impact on the future of Ukraine, and for American hegemony.

COMPARING EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN POLICIES VIS-À-VIS UKRAINE

[2013-2024]

This last chapter is going to compare the analyses of *Chapter Two* and *Chapter Three*, with the aim of underlining the main similarities and differences between the European and American approaches to Ukraine in the last decade. As such, it will follow the same structure as the previous chapters: after a brief introduction (Section 4.1), it will first focus on the Euromaidan protests (Section 4.2), then on the war in Donbas from 2014 to 2022 (Section 4.3), and finally on the full-scale war until 2024 (Section 4.4). It will, in short, mirror the timeline division of the previous chapters, so as to remain coherent with their research. The research question, therefore, is “How do the US and EU policies vis-à-vis Ukraine compare?”.

This last part does not aim to introduce a new concept as a basis for its analysis. It is not considered necessary, as it is going to consider those already introduced previously, *actorness* and *hegemony*, which have been used to explain the behaviours adopted by the EU and the USA. Consequently, for its research method, it will use a comparative analysis to contrast European and American positions towards Ukraine. In addition, this chapter is not going to introduce new significant primary sources, as those that have already been gathered are more than sufficient to allow a sound comparison in this section. Therefore, the additional primary sources that this chapter will include will not add anything new to the debate, but will just confirm and strengthen the already mentioned positions.

4.1 Introduction

According to Christopher Pickvance, comparative analysis needs to respect two precise conditions: its data must be gathered on at least two cases, and it must not limit itself to describing them, but explanation must also play a major role.¹⁴⁷ The analysis carried out in this chapter will follow these two criteria. It already respects the number of cases, as it will compare Europe with

¹⁴⁷ Christopher G. Pickvance, "Four Varieties of Comparative Analysis", *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 16, no. 1 (March 2001): 7–28.

America, as well as the descriptive part, which is the content of the previous two chapters. As such, the research done so far is only a juxtaposition of the cases: what is missing is a section of proper explanatory analysis. The goal for this last section, therefore, is to unravel and understand the conditions that caused the different historical developments between the EU and the US towards Kyiv.

However, it is important to mention that comparative analysis may present some weaknesses with respect to this research. First of all, comparing the EU and the US as two entities equally involved with Ukrainian policies may pose a problem of conceptual equivalence, as they actually had different levels of leverage in the equilibrium of international relations, and consequently different influences over Kyiv. Moreover, cases like these, which consider a timeframe of over ten years, require a large quantity of primary sources to support them, which for reasons of length were not possible to collect in this thesis alone. What has been gathered so far, though, is considered the most relevant for this analysis. Lastly, comparative analysis is often based on cultural explanations, and the fact that they are indeed enough to clarify the variation of the data may be a matter of debate. Having said that, this kind of research still remains the most suited for this chapter, as it respects all of its criteria and allows a sound answer to the differences and similarities between the factions of analysis.

4.2 Comparing European and American relations vis-à-vis Ukraine during Euromaidan (2013-2014)

The events that unfolded in Ukraine during the three months of continuous protests against Janukovyč were received differently within the Western bloc. Initially, both the EU and the US did not fully comprehend the significance of those protests, and what they meant for Ukrainian citizens. This can be observed in the lack of an immediate reaction, as Brussels decided to wait until the Vilnius meeting, almost a week after the beginning of Euromaidan, while Washington was still disengaged with Kyiv due to the “Ukraine fatigue” brought about by Janukovyč’s policies. Therefore, they missed the opportunity to foster their relations there, as they both waited for the events to evolve before making a significant move.

Yet, after the refusal to sign the Association Agreement was issued by Janukovyč, Europe immediately delegitimised the Ukrainian government and sided with the protesters. Brussels finally decided to directly intervene, and during the months of December and January there was a

cautious optimism about completing the EU's expansion eastward.¹⁴⁸ Even if a Ukrainian membership seemed unlikely, the EU was pushing for it to become the final goal of the Euromaidan revolution, which was initially focused on Janukovyč's removal from power and a simple realignment with the West. Having understood that the protesters shared the same values as the Union significantly contributed to their fraternisation, thus leading many European leaders to approach the events with the clear objective of extracting Ukraine from Russian influence.¹⁴⁹

As such, the EU obtained important objectives, such as the creation of a new Ukrainian government that refused to align with Russia, and the signing of the AA, with the promise that talks for a future membership would continue. Euromaidan helped Europe to leave its neutral position, but it did not lead to a complete mobilisation to support Ukraine, which was consequently left vulnerable to Russian interventions. However, Brussels used the events as a starting point to resume its enlargement policies, and it slowly began to favour more active measures to sustain them.

The US, on the other hand, did not expose itself in the same way. Even though it sided with the protesters and sent Victoria Nuland to Kyiv in December and January to strengthen its diplomatic influence, it did not actively engage to subvert Janukovyč's regime in the same way as the EU. Washington clearly did not have the same interests as Brussels in Ukraine, primarily due to geographic and cultural distance. The lack of a direct involvement by President Obama during the entire Euromaidan revolution — only vice-president Biden spoke remotely to Janukovyč — further demonstrates this.

The content of American sources therefore depicts a different scenario. The US was not politically motivated to intervene, but it was ready to support the Revolution due to its belief in the core values of the protests. As Ben Rhodes, the Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications, mentioned in early 2014, "the United States supports a set of universal values around the world, [...] and so we did have significant concerns over some of the laws that were passed in Ukraine that impose very severe restrictions on the ability of people to express themselves peacefully, to protest, to demonstrate on behalf of their political views"; at the same time, regarding a possible integration of Ukraine within the Western hemisphere, he remarked that "Ukraine's orientation and continued integration towards Europe and the West is important

¹⁴⁸ Ferenc Mészlivetz, "The Post-Euromaidan Future for Europe", in *Reframing Europe's Future: Challenges and Failures of the European Construction*, 16 (New York: Routledge, 2015), 249–59.

¹⁴⁹ Sviatoslav Sviatnenko, "Euromaidan Values from a Comparative Perspective", *Social, Health, and Communication Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (November 2014): 41–61.

because there is a set of common values and common history, and also, frankly, because we believe it can be mutually beneficial to Ukraine, to Europe, and the United States to have closer ties on issues like trade and political relations”.¹⁵⁰ His position clearly represents the diplomatic objectives that the Obama administration had set for Kyiv.

Both the EU and the US were therefore aligned in the future they envisioned for Ukraine, which was to be a nation integrated with them and a member of the European Union. However, while the EU exposed itself directly, the US carefully avoided doing so, and supported changes in Ukraine while working at the same time with Janukovyč. Unlike the EU, Obama did not consider the Maidan Revolution as pivotal for his future relations with Ukraine, and he did not foresee significant developments in the near future.

4.3 Comparing European and American relations vis-à-vis Ukraine during the War in Donbas (2014-2022)

With the escalation in 2014, the EU and the US found themselves in uncharted waters, as they both felt the need to intervene in favour of Ukraine, but they had never had to deal with a military threat from Russia. Their reactions, therefore, were initially different. When the first Russian troops landed in Crimea, the EU was slow to take a stance, and during the first days of the invasion it did not provide any significant help to Kyiv, as the primary sources in *Chapter Two* show. Its first measures were just sanctions against a reduced number of Russian policymakers believed to be behind the invasion, without any direct help to Ukraine, which remained defenceless. This lack of response can be attributed to the nature of the EU itself, as it cannot act as a unitary bloc, but only as a union of states. Each nation, therefore, viewed the events in Ukraine from different perspectives, and most of the Western members, which were heavily dependent on Russian energy imports, did not want to undermine their relations with the Kremlin, even at the price of renouncing Ukraine.¹⁵¹

By contrast, the US did not have these problems, as it was not as dependent on Russia as EU members, and its power was only in the hands of Obama, thereby being free to act more aggressively from the immediate start of the Crimean crisis. This led to the rapid condemnation of Russian actions, and to imposing harsher sanctions than its European counterpart. These actions,

¹⁵⁰ Ben Rhodes, “2014 Foreign Policy Priorities for the Obama Administration”. *US Department of State*, Washington DC, 29 January 2014.

¹⁵¹ Hiski Haukkala, “‘Crowdfunded Diplomacy’? The EU’s Role in the Triangular Diplomacy Over the Ukraine Crisis”, in *Triangular Diplomacy among the United States, the European Union, and the Russian Federation*, ed. by Vicki L. Birchfield and Alasdair R. Young (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 77–94.

however, were made in anticipation that the EU would soon follow them, which happened in spring 2014 after the further Russian escalations in the Donbas region.¹⁵² This anticipation shows the hegemonic role that Washington had in global policies, and the lack of actorness of Brussels, which was not able to offer significant help to a nation in its sphere of influence without American support.

As such, after the initial divisions, the convergence of European and American interests towards Ukraine represents the most significant development in their policies. They both supported similar sanctions against Russia, while sponsoring projects to sustain Kyiv's economic and political reforms. At the same time, they both pushed for further integration within the European Union, while avoiding taking a stance on an eventual membership into NATO. However, it is still worth noting that, although significant progress was made, even towards NATO, the prospect of Ukraine obtaining its EU membership seemed unlikely even in early 2022, when Russia launched the full-scale invasion.

This shift in policies despite the important differences between the two factions can be explained in different ways. One main reason was that they both condemned Russia's use of force. If Crimea was annexed "with no shot being fired"¹⁵³, as Vladimir Putin often claimed, the same cannot be said about his intervention in Donbas. Their policies in support of Ukraine, therefore, can be interpreted as a way to counter what they perceived as a clear violation of international law.¹⁵⁴ To Brussels it was imperative to grant its support to those citizens who were risking their lives for European values, while Washington intervened to protect the democratic transition of Ukraine.

Secondly, the previous chapters show that the Russian actions undermined the EU's actorness over its eastern borders, and American hegemony in that region of Europe, challenging the equilibrium that was created after the end of the Cold War. Therefore, their policies were also aimed at weakening Russia, and bringing Ukraine back to the Western sphere of influence. Both had something to gain by strengthening Kyiv and granting it EU membership, permanently removing it to the Kremlin's control. Hence, they coordinated not only to offer aid to Ukraine, but also to impose sanctions on Russia, and expel it from the G8.

¹⁵² Deborah Welch Larson, "Outsourced Diplomacy: The Obama Administration and the Ukraine Crisis", in *Triangular Diplomacy among the United States, the European Union, and the Russian Federation*, ed. by Vicki L. Birchfield and Alasdair R. Young (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 55–76.

¹⁵³ Peter M. Olson, "The Lawfulness of Russian Use of Force in Crimea", *Military Law and Law of War Review* 53, no. 1 (2014): 17–44.

¹⁵⁴ Mikulas Fabry, "Whose International Law? Legal Clashes in the Ukrainian Crisis", in *Triangular Diplomacy among the United States, the European Union, and the Russian Federation*, ed. by Vicki L. Birchfield and Alasdair R. Young (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 169–88.

Still, the American and European alignment also produced some negative results. Having similar policies meant also obtaining similar outcomes. While they both avoided the fall of Ukrainian democracy, they were not able to stop the conflict, which continued to ravage the Donbas for seven years. Their fear of a direct confrontation with Russia meant that Kyiv did not receive sufficient military aid to launch a successful counteroffensive, and Crimea and the other occupied regions remained in Russian hands. At the same time, the process for NATO membership, despite Poroshenko and Zelenskyy's efforts to pursue it, proceeded deliberately slowly, and no concrete result was reached by 2022. These are signs that after the initial shock the West became accustomed to the new status quo, and it prioritised avoiding further escalations rather than granting Ukraine its full support. These aspects are also the main reasons that led to them being caught by surprise when Putin began massing his army on the Ukrainian border in late 2021, as they were convinced that they had managed to avoid further escalations.

4.4 Comparing European and American relations vis-à-vis Ukraine during the Russian invasion (2022-2024)

The American-European alignment also persisted during Putin's invasion. The response given by the EU and the US was in fact similar, with both imposing more severe sanctions against Russia, and providing unprecedented support in military assistance to Ukraine. For the first time since Euromaidan, it was also effective in countering Russian expansionism, as it managed to halt the speed of the military intervention the Kremlin had planned, shifting the initial momentum to the Ukrainian Army's side. After the weaker Western policies of the previous decade, Putin failed to foresee such a unanimous response: in the first phase of the conflict every EU member state, even those with historically closer ties with the Kremlin, sided with Ukraine.

Initially, American aid given to Ukraine was greater than all EU member states combined. By April 2022, in fact, the US had given Ukraine €7.6 billion worth of assistance, while the EU (including the United Kingdom) €6.6 billion.¹⁵⁵ These data, however, do not take into consideration the main structural differences between the US and the EU, with the latter being divided between twenty-seven sovereign nations. The same analysis in terms of percentage of gross domestic product

¹⁵⁵ Arianna Antezza et al., "Which Countries Help Ukraine and How? Introducing the Ukraine Support Tracker", *Kiel Working Paper*, no. 2218 (April 2022).

(GDP) that each nation contributed to Kyiv shows that many European nations, especially on the Eastern border, devoted a larger proportion of their economy than the US to support Ukraine.

Overall, however, it was the EU that managed to gain more influence in Ukrainian territory, thanks to the final approval of Kyiv's membership application within the Union. Even if a formal accession does not appear feasible for the near future, during the first two years of war significant steps were made in that direction, as Zelenskyy personally appealed to European leaders to strengthen their relationships. Additionally, the US was strongly in favour of Ukraine becoming an EU member state, and it aligned itself with Brussels' vision for the future of the nation.

In contrast, Washington did not make the same steps towards NATO's inclusion of Ukraine, even though it benefited from the joining of Finland and Sweden in 2023 and 2024. In fact, Biden remained cautious, as he wanted to avoid dragging the Organisation into a direct military confrontation against Russia. His position was also shared by the European members of NATO (with the exceptions of Lithuania and Poland), as even if they strongly supported the Ukrainian cause, they remained reluctant about the prospect of its NATO membership, viewing it as a threat to European security.¹⁵⁶ This worry was shared by Biden in an interview with *CNN* in July 2023, where he admitted that in the Organisation there was no unanimity "about whether or not to bring Ukraine into the NATO family now, at this moment, in the middle of a war".¹⁵⁷ The solution chosen by the West was to further integrate Ukraine into the Organisation by strengthening their cooperation and sharing intelligence, overcoming the need for formal membership. Still, Kyiv is insisting on being part of NATO for its security guarantees, as it would bring the direct military protection of all its member states.

There are several reasons that can explain these different approaches. First of all, Europe feels more involved than America in the events in Ukraine. The geographical and cultural factors, as many Europeans now consider Ukrainians as part of their neighbourhood, play a major role in how the war is perceived. As such, while the US considers the Russian invasion mainly as a threat to its hegemonic power on the European continent, the EU views it not only as a challenge to its actorness, but also as a danger to its own identity. Not being able to grant protection to a nation that has expressed its desire to be part of your own institution would mean for Brussels a complete loss of international credibility and would drive several other orbiting nations away from its influence. In essence, the EU's final goal is the protection of Ukraine as a sovereign nation to finally

¹⁵⁶ Catarina Thomson et al., "European Public Opinion: United in Supporting Ukraine, Divided on the Future of NATO", *International Affairs* 99, no. 6 (6 November 2023): 2485–2500.

¹⁵⁷ Zachary B. Wolf, "It's not so easy for Biden to evolve on Ukraine joining NATO". *CNN*, 10 July 2023.

welcome it within the Union, while for the US the purpose of helping Kyiv is to weaken Russia: Brussels views Ukraine as a part of its identity, while Washington sees it as a strategic asset. In Biden's words, "what happens to Ukraine matters. It matters to all of Europe. It matters to NATO."¹⁵⁸ It does not directly impact on the US itself.

These observations may also explain why, excluding the initial months of the conflict, European aid for Kyiv surpassed that sent from America. By the end of 2024, in fact, Ukraine had received from the US an estimated amount of €114 billion, while Europe (including also the United Kingdom and the European institutions, which alone donated more than €16 billion per year) reached €130 billion.¹⁵⁹ These data, however, may not mean that Washington is not willing to commit to its full potential, as President Biden has always remarked its complete support for the Ukrainian cause. It could signify, on the contrary, an increased economic power of the European Union. It may therefore be the result of a rise in its actorness, that developed due to the events in Ukraine during the past decade, allowing it to reach an influence comparable to that of the United States. Whether this also brings an equal leverage on the international stage, however, remains a matter of debate.

4.5 Conclusion

What happened in Ukraine since the winter of 2013 has profoundly shaped the Western bloc. In just the span of a decade, its relations with Kyiv evolved significantly, and what was considered merely a peripheral nation became a crucial actor in the intricate equilibrium of European and American power play against Russia.

However, from 2013 to the end of 2024, EU and US policies vis-à-vis Ukraine did not follow a completely similar path. Their comparison, in fact, highlights compelling findings. Firstly, they were both unprepared to give their support to the Euromaidan protesters, until it became morally necessary for them after the first documented violence by the governmental police. Then, European support was far more significant than American one, and it played a major role in strengthening the revolution and the fall of Janukovyč's government. After all, Ukrainians were fighting for Europe, not for America.

¹⁵⁸ Joseph R. Biden Jr., "Remarks by President Biden on the Ukraine Compact". *The White House*, Washington DC, 11 July 2024.

¹⁵⁹ Giuseppe Irto et al., "Ukraine Aid: How Europe Can Replace US Support", *Kiel Policy Brief*, no. 186 (March 2025).

Yet, it was Washington that was better prepared to the Russian military interventions of 2014, and its support proved more efficient than Brussels' in the first few months. The seven-year period of the war in Donbas was fundamental for Ukraine to finally establish closer and stronger ties with the two blocs, as it formally requested an EU membership and began the internal reforms necessary for its acquisition, while simultaneously enhancing its collaboration with NATO. From the previous chapters, it is evident that Kyiv's primary objective, at least until 2022, remained EU accession. Most of the progress, therefore, was made in this direction, and as such Kyiv now holds EU candidate status, granted a few days after the launch of the Russian invasion, while the same cannot be said for NATO. Yet, the last three years of war shifted Ukraine's priorities, and consequently its relations with the West followed the same path. Much more importance was given to military aid in order to defend itself from Russia, and as such Zelenskyy dedicated more of his efforts to NATO: by the end of 2024 their cooperation was deeply strengthened, even though he did not manage to obtain a formal membership application.

The difference in approaches that the EU and US had towards Ukraine during the first half of the last decade narrowed in the later period, albeit for different reasons. While Brussels wanted to assert its actorness over Ukraine to complete its eastward expansion, Washington aimed to preserve its hegemony by weakening Russia. Still, by the end of 2024 Ukraine became heavily reliant on them as it cannot win the war with its own effort, while the West needs Ukraine to remain in its sphere of influence for all the reasons introduced in this thesis. Both factions need each other, and throughout this decade they have constantly grown closer.

CONCLUSION

Results

This thesis opened with the research question of “How did the political, economic, and military policies of the EU and the USA vis-à-vis Ukraine evolve, 2013-2024?”, and subsequently analysed this evolution in the previous three chapters. *Chapter Two* highlighted how the support of the EU underwent a gradual increase, from the complete lack of actorness during Euromaidan, where Brussels expressed support solely throughout words, to the fierce intervention in 2022 that allowed Kyiv to resist Russia’s occupation to the present day. It was possible only thanks to the diplomatic progress made from 2015 onwards, which allowed Ukraine to finally submit its membership application for the EU on 28 February 2022.

Chapter Three studied how the relationship between Washington and Kyiv evolved over that same timeframe. It began as a strategic partnership, and thus involved little interest in developing strong cultural ties between the two nations. As such, during Euromaidan the American reaction was even weaker than that of the EU, primarily due to the “Ukraine fatigue” brought about by the policies of Janukovyč. However, when its hegemony in Eastern Europe was directly challenged by the Crimean occupation, the US were quick to dictate the Western response to the crisis, encouraging Europe to follow the same line. Still, its interest was only to direct Kyiv towards the EU, not NATO, and although several advances had been made in the following years, they were not significant enough to grant it membership. The peak of American support for Ukraine was reached after the launch of the Russian invasion, and it remained constant until the election of Donald Trump.

Chapter Four, at last, compared the two approaches to Ukraine. Both factions were largely unprepared for the Maidan Revolution, but the EU managed to offer to the Ukrainian people a more impactful form of support, which eventually contributed to the fall of Janukovyč’s regime. On the other hand, the US was more active during the Crimean crisis, with the imposition of the first, although weak, sanctions against the Kremlin. Between 2015 and 2021 both the EU and the US grew significantly closer to Kyiv, as their policies had a common goal, that of Ukraine being able to join the EU in the future. At the same time, the European aspiration was also the main diplomatic goal for Kyiv. With the start of the full-scale war in 2022, however, Ukrainian priorities changed, as it shifted more towards NATO due to the security guarantees that it would have brought. The West

was split in this regard, and a NATO admission was — and still is — not favoured by the key members of the Organisation, fearing an escalation of the conflict. Even the United States have not been completely open on the matter, despite having increased the co-operation between NATO and Ukraine.

Both factions, in short, need Ukraine to remain under the Western sphere of influence, and as such their policies in the last decade have worked towards this objective. The EU considered it essential to complete its eastward expansion, and to exert its actorness over its eastern borders. Ukraine is seen as the last major nation which feels culturally European, yet is not part of the Union, hence making a moral imperative to support its aspirations. Conversely, the US wants a sovereign Ukraine to counter Russian expansionism towards the west. Having a strong buffer nation in that region would also allow Washington to maintain its hegemony over Eastern Europe, overseeing both Russia and the EU.

Innovative aspects

As mentioned in *Chapter One*, this thesis is based on a list of twenty-two peer-reviewed academic articles on the diplomatic relations between the West and Kyiv. This debate is mainly focused on the approaches that each faction should adopt towards Ukraine, in light of the timeframe when each article was written. For instance, before the Russian invasion, the prospects for the future of Kyiv were mostly considered positive, due to the process of internal reforms that the nation was undertaking. Conversely, since 2022 the focus has shifted to short-term policies to end the war in the more advantageous way for Kyiv, given the urgency of the events.

On this account, this thesis adds three major innovations at the debate. Firstly, it considers the European and American policies as part of two different entities instead of a single united bloc, “the West”. This allows to better study and comprehend the main differences that these approaches followed, especially with regards to the accession to memberships of the EU and NATO. Despite the many similarities, in fact, each actor interacted with Ukraine in pursuit of its own objective. As such, the EU’s support was driven mainly by a cultural ideology, while for the US it was mostly a matter of power projection.

Secondly, this thesis analyses the events through different lenses by considering the concepts of *actorness* and *hegemony*. This makes it possible to approach European and American

policies from a precise point of view which remains constant throughout all the timeframe considered, showing the evolution of these notions in the last decade.

At last, it provides a significant empirical contribution by considering original primary sources until November 2024. This corpus allows an up-to-date analysis of a contemporary topic which is constantly evolving, and permits to frame the different perspectives of the main actors of Western diplomacy vis-à-vis Ukraine.

Limitations

While this thesis provides a detailed study of the development of Western relations with Ukraine, it is also subjected to certain limitations. These mainly arise from the complexity of the topic, which covers more than a decade of intricate political and diplomatic events between three distinct factions. As such, the corpus of primary sources that has been used as basis for this study, although vast, may still be insufficient for a complete understanding of the developments in that timeframe. Moreover, all the references used are in the English language, thus underrepresenting Ukrainian sources in a topic that specifically centres on Ukraine.

A second important element to concerns regards the interpretation of these sources. Despite the attempts to maintain a neutral perspective, the choice of the corpus of sources may reflect research biases. Almost all of them follow a pro-Western perspective of the events, one in which Russia is to be considered the primary party responsible for the conflict that ravaged Ukraine. Different academic opinions that shift the perspective, mainly that of John Mearsheimer, have been given less importance so as to maintain a cohesive approach to the topic.¹⁶⁰

At last, the geopolitical complexity of the events may also pose some constraints. By the time I am writing this paragraph, the full-scale invasion which began in February 2022 is still far from over, and its final outcome is more unpredictable than ever. Although I have limited the timeframe to the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States (November 2024), the end of the conflict or other unexpected developments in Western diplomacy towards Kyiv may challenge the overall findings of this thesis, thus weakening its relevance.

These limitations, although significant, do not compromise the overall findings. The results of the thesis, in fact, mainly come from the way such sources have been interpreted with respect to

¹⁶⁰ Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin".

the concepts of *actorness* and *hegemony*, and not from the corpus itself. As such, the elements that are now considered as “limitations” may actually encourage for further research on the topic, so as to include different perspectives on these events.

Significance

The choice of a contemporary topic for this thesis gives it greater significance for its influence on the field of international relations. IR scholars could, in fact, use it as a background to better understand the diplomatic implications of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, and perhaps to predict the effects of its eventual conclusion.

The findings can also help estimate the future evolutions of European and American policies towards Kyiv, both during and after the war. This may be particularly useful, especially in light of EU and NATO memberships, which are at the centre of the debate for peace negotiations between Ukraine and Russia. Moreover, understanding the differences between the European and American approaches to Ukraine is of strategic importance for academic research on the expansion of Western institutions.

At last, having used real-time original primary sources contributes to the legitimacy of the thesis, giving it academic credibility. This allows it to serve as a solid basis for further expansions of the topic, perhaps after the conclusion of the conflict.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA = Association Agreement

DCFTA = Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area

ECHR = European Court of Human Rights

ENP = European Neighbourhood Policy

EU = European Union

GDP = Gross domestic product

IR = International relations

MAP = Membership Action Plan

NAC = North Atlantic Council

NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NPT = Non-Proliferation Treaty

PCA = Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

PRA = Presidential Records Act

UCL = University College London

UN = United Nations

US/USA = United States/United States of America

USSR = Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics

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