

Ukraine in EU security: an undervalued partner

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>> There has been heated debate about Ukraine's democratic retreat, EU-Ukraine trade talks and the EU's diversion of attention from its Eastern neighbours to North Africa. But Ukraine's evolving security orientation has been neglected. Since adopting a 'non-bloc' status in 2010, the country's evolving international cooperation in the security sphere has virtually been ignored by experts and policy-makers.

The security issue should not be overlooked. For years Ukraine has been a European Union security partner, given the importance of security and defence to its integration into Europe. However, analysis of the current stage of EU-Ukraine security relations invites a surprising conclusion: while the EU is worried about Ukraine moving towards Russia, it is in fact the EU that seeks greater cooperation with Russia on security issues, which risks excluding Ukraine from the emerging European security architecture.

INTEGRATING THROUGH SECURITY

As Ukraine's 'non-bloc status' prevents Ukraine's integration into any security alliance (and NATO, in particular) on a legislative level, cooperation with the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has become increasingly important. While Ukraine cannot formally be part of the CSDP, alignment with EU statements and policies keeps Ukraine within the EU's orbit. Ukraine's President, Viktor Yanukovich, argued at the Meeting of Ambassadors in December 2010 that Ukraine's membership of the EU would guarantee Ukraine's security consistent with its 'non-bloc' status.

HIGHLIGHTS

- While the European Union (EU) is worried about Ukraine's drift towards Russia, it is in fact the EU, not Ukraine, that seeks greater partnership with Russia on security issues.
- Against the backdrop of Ukraine's 'non-bloc status' Ukraine's cooperation with the EU within CSDP is important to keep Ukraine within the EU's orbit.
- The EU should make it clear to Ukraine that its security is not a bargaining matter in its relations with Russia.

»»»»» Since 2005 Ukraine has enjoyed a privileged status under the CSDP. Together with Moldova it can align itself with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) statements and decisions. This mechanism had been traditionally applied to candidate countries, so that they have enough time to adapt to CSDP rules and mechanisms, as well as to European Economic Area members. Ukraine's right to align with EU CFSP declarations and common positions was reiterated in the Association Agenda, the provisional EU-Ukraine agreement which is valid until the new Association Agreement is signed. Ukraine also signed a Permanent Security Agreement on the exchange of classified information with the EU in 2005. In March 2008 the Verkhovna Rada ratified the EU-Ukraine Agreement establishing a framework for Ukraine's participation in EU crisis management operations. Ukraine has a good record of alignment with EU common diplomatic positions. According to a report presented in March 2010 by Ukraine's cabinet it has aligned itself with 90 per cent of common EU positions.

Under president Viktor Yanukovich, Ukraine's political position has seen some changes. In 2010, it aligned to only 26 out of 44 CFSP statements, significantly less than in previous years. One of the areas of discord was the EU position on repression in Belarus. Ukraine refrained from joining the Visegrad Group declaration on Belarus in February 2011. However, it did issue sharp declarations on Belarus on several occasions after brutal treatment of the opposition in December 2010.

Currently, Ukraine is one of 14 third states (alongside Albania, Angola, Canada, Chile, Croatia, FYROM, Iceland, Montenegro, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey, and the US) and the only Eastern partner, which contributes to the EU's ongoing missions and operations. Ukraine is engaged in the European Union Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the ATALANTA mission combating piracy off the coast of Somalia. On 1 July 2011 the Ukrainian Naval Forces joined the Greek-led European Union Battle Group HELBROC on a six month stand-by duty. Ukraine is the third

country after Turkey and Norway to send its troops to the military group of the Union.

Alongside the EU, Ukraine insists on the resolution of the 'frozen' conflicts in the EU neighbourhood on the basis of the territorial sovereignty of Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan. All three countries welcomed Yanukovich's reiterating this, since it had been feared that he would assume a pro-Russian position on the issues. Ukraine is instrumental to Transnistrian conflict resolution – an issue high on the EU-Ukraine foreign and security policy agenda. Since 1994 Ukraine has played the role of mediator in the Transnistrian conflict – the only 'frozen' conflict located directly on the EU border. As it shares a border with Transnistria and the break-away region has a sizeable Ukrainian community, Ukraine is vital to developing a conflict-resolution plan. It was Ukraine that invited the European Union and the US to join the conflict-resolution process as observers in a 5+2 format. The EU Border Assistance Mission to the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine – a technical and advisory mission whose mandate is 'to help improve the capacity of the Moldovan and Ukrainian border and customs services to prevent and detect smuggling, trafficking of goods and human beings, and customs fraud, by providing advice and training' - was established at Ukraine's and Moldova's request.

Of course, EU-Ukraine security cooperation is not without difficulties. In particular, providing financial support to its political commitments is often a problem for Ukraine. Ukraine's 2011 Defence Budget is 6 times smaller than that of Poland. Nevertheless, in terms of the depth of cooperation on security issues, Ukraine is a frontrunner among the EU Eastern neighbours.

EU-RUSSIA RAPPROCHEMENT SEEN FROM UKRAINE

Against this backdrop, Ukraine views EU-Russia security relations with increasing concern. Brussels and Moscow disagree on many issues of

global security. And yet, Russia, rather than Ukraine, has become the significant security partner of the European Union. This is hardly surprising since Russian influence on European politics is far stronger than that of Ukraine. But it does question the perception that the EU looks for shared views on crucial international issues from its security partners.

Moscow has not tried to align its foreign policy to that of the EU – rather, its policies often directly contradict EU positions. In contrast to the EU and Ukraine, Russia has acknowledged the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and

provides essential economic support to the Transnistrian region. Russia also refused to follow up on its commitment to withdraw troops from Transnistria (according to the

Istanbul commitments of 1999) and Georgia (after signing a six-point peace pact brokered by French President Nicolas Sarkozy). The Kremlin has criticised the EU's Eastern Partnership as a threat to its 'sphere of privileged interests'. The Russian Federation actually provoked the establishment of some CSDP missions – the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia was launched precisely in the aftermath of Russian-Georgian war.

Nonetheless, the European Security Strategy defines Russia as a key actor with whom the EU wants to build a strategic partnership. By 2001 Russia already had more developed relations with the CSDP (then ESDP) than any other third country. Since the same year Russia has had consultations with the EU Political and Security Committee, the primary decision-making body of CSDP, on a monthly basis. Russia saw the CSDP as convenient cooperation format, since, in contrast to NATO, the EU lacked both the capabilities and the ambition to face Russia's armed forces. However, the Kremlin soon became frustrated, feeling that the EU did not

treat it as an equal partner and failed to establish a joint consultative body. This contrasts with Ukraine's support for the alignment of policies, part of its effort to establish itself as a reliable security partner. In June 2010 General Hakan Siren, Chairman of the EU Military Committee, cited Russia's appeal for a 'real partnership role' in the Common Security and Defence missions and referred to the ongoing discussions with Russia and Ukraine on the issue.

The creation of the European External Action Service, while proving positive for Russia, has not contributed to security relations between the EU and Ukraine in any significant way. Indeed, Ukraine is low on the agenda for EU High Representative Catherine Ashton. Her first visit to Ukraine in the HR capacity was when she chose to attend the inauguration of Ukraine's President Viktor Yanukovich. However, this meant that she did not chair the first meeting of the EU defence ministers after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, held on 24 February 2010. EU ministers' criticism of this decision did not bode well for Ashton's future dialogue with the Ukrainian leadership: her next official visit to Ukraine after Yanukovich's inauguration, scheduled for 1-2 March 2011, was cancelled due to the revolutions in North Africa and Middle East.

The High Representative's trip to Kiev in 2010 was preceded by her visit to Russia. She also attended the EU-Russia Summit held in the Russian city of Rostov-on-Don in the summer of the same year and met with Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on different occasions later on. Despite numerous disagreements on a number of issues, from human rights to policy towards Iran and Europe's frozen conflicts, Ashton issued a statement with Sergey Lavrov on the situation in North Africa and the Middle East in February 2011 – exactly on the same day that her visit to Ukraine was 'postponed'.

So far signs of such partnership have been out of President Yanukovich's reach. In fact, most communication between the EU and Ukraine is



Ukraine's evolving security orientation has been neglected

»»»»» done through the President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso and EU Commissioner for Enlargement and ENP Štefan Füle, the latter being a frequent visitor to Kiev, in contrast to Lady Ashton.

PROTECTED OR SQUEEZED?

Ukraine has so far not openly voiced concern about deepening EU-Russia relations in the security sphere. However, the European Union has given Ukraine's authorities reasons to worry. After considering President Medvedev's proposal for a New European Security Architecture, in 2010 Germany proposed an EU-Russia Committee on Foreign Policy and Security at the level of Ashton-Lavrov. In exchange for setting up such a body the Germans expected Russia to invest effort in resolving the Transnistria conflict.

Despite holding conflict mediator status on a par with Russia, Ukraine was not invited to the negotiations over the Committee. Officially, Ukraine unconditionally supports any steps taken towards the Transnistria conflict resolution provided Moldova's territorial sovereignty is respected. Some diplomats, though, share a concern that the proposed body could turn into a new security structure in Europe, which will undermine existing security formats like NATO, OSCE and CSDP. As a security recipient rather than a security provider, Ukraine perceives the EU as a mediator between itself and Russia. If at some point Moscow and Brussels reach an agreement on a joint security format, Ukraine would not be able to defend its own security interests.

The Ukrainian ministry of foreign affairs commissioned embassies in EU countries to conduct a survey in each member state to discover opinions on establishing such a Committee. The research returned soothing results: some EU Member States did not have strong reservations about the institution but saw little added value in it, while the smaller EU members were strongly against Russia having a

stake in EU foreign policy and security decisions. Indeed, a year on, there has been little progress on the project for a number of reasons. Russia and Germany have failed to reach agreement about the sequence of actions: Germany requires that the Committee be established after Russian moves towards resolving the Transnistria conflict, while Russia insists that the issue must be discussed after the Committee begins work.

Ukraine also raised concerns over the Franco-Russian naval deal. In January 2011 France signed an agreement to sell 4 Mistral-class assault ships to Russia. The deal clearly shifts the balance of power in the region against Ukraine and other worried countries, namely Georgia. The vessels acquire additional meaning as the agreement to station the Russian Black Sea Fleet in the Ukrainian naval base of Sevastopol was extended to 2042. Though the Mistral's stationing in the Crimea is highly unlikely, the Franco-Russian deal certainly does not contribute to Ukraine's security.

CONCLUSION

Should Ukraine really worry about the EU-Russia security rapprochement? Ukrainian diplomats believe that as of now, Ukraine is more deeply integrated into the EU security space than Russia. They welcome EU-Russian convergence but they are fearful of it becoming an obstacle in EU-Ukraine relations. Ukrainian authorities say that they will voice concern if the EU-Russia security dialogue deepens too much.

It is hard to argue with the fact that the geopolitical weight of Russia and Ukraine is different. So is the nature of their security relations with the EU: while Russia can only be an external security partner to the Union, Ukraine aspires to integrate fully into its structures. With the Association Agreement due to be signed by the EU and Ukraine, more cooperation on security will become available to Ukraine. Ukrainian authorities could capitalise

on this and promote their cooperation with the EU within the CSDP, making it a success story in EU-Ukraine relations.

In turn, the EU should make it clear to Ukraine that its security is not a matter for bargaining with Russia. Given the ongoing cooperation with Ukraine within the CSDP over many years, the EU should do more to welcome and encourage a deepening of such commitment from Kiev. This would be a cost effective way for the EU to boost its own attractiveness in Ukraine whilst also demonstrating that, despite its 'non-bloc' status, Ukraine is actively engaged in European security projects. While some experts in Ukraine and the EU member states perceive Ukraine to be divided and drifting towards Russia, such a declaration would be a clear indication of Ukraine's faithfulness to European integration norms.

The Common Security and Defence Policy represents an excellent chance for the EU to spread its influence in the region, while for Ukraine it is an opportunity to solidify its geopolitical orientation without compromising its 'non-bloc status'. If the EU is looking for a success story in the Eastern neighbourhood, engaging Ukraine into the European security architecture offers much unfulfilled potential.

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