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## **'EU-ropeanisation' of Europe's 'periphery': a case study**

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### **Abstract**

The European Union is seen as a centre of continental gravity, which exercises both passive (though its attractiveness) and active (though dialogue and cooperation) force of leverage on the neighbouring countries. In this paper I would like to analyse the interactionist cultural-political stand-off between the political elites in the European Union and Ukraine and their mutual relations since Ukraine's independence. I will explain the course of the EU-Ukraine dialogue and interaction with help of both discourses and policies.

Since recently there has been a positive change towards Ukraine in the EU's rhetorical discourses and official declarations. At the same time any explicit promises on the European side concerning the possibility of Ukraine's full membership in the near future are absent so far. The reasons for such apparently cool attitude are generally seen in the 'realist realm', e.g. in the lack of positive results from cooperation with Ukrainian ruling elite in the past, internal problems of recent enlargements within the EU itself, and current but already traditional political volatility in Ukraine, conditioned by its political and socio-economic diversity and proximity to resurgent Russia.

**Keywords:** *EU, Ukraine, elite, identity, discourses*

### **Short theory introduction**

There is a plethora of scientific and practical approaches aimed at sufficiently explaining both the idealistic discourses and real policy outcomes of successive EU enlargements. Apart from

constructivist, realist, neo-realist and other materialistic theories both scholars and practitioners also emphasised the importance of policies, institutions, leverage tools, geopolitical considerations, rhetorical / identity discourses and (un) foregone windows of opportunity. I will try to explain the course of the EU-Ukraine dialogue and interaction with help of both identity discourses and policies.

According to Molchanov (2007) the state identities are unique because they are established, changed, negotiated and redefined in the process of social interaction with other states. Social identity as such implies a stable set of linkages between the self-perceived membership in a group of states, like the EU and the agent's attitudes, perceptions and values resulting in social behavior. Social identity is "socially constructed by actors creating inter-subjective meanings (culture, norms, common understandings) through interaction in a community" (Green, 2002:11). It links an individual to his referent group and vice versa, thus providing a higher moral authority. As such the concept of social identity is crucial to understanding of states' behavior in the international arena.

Constructivism, highlighting the importance of EU's social identity, resultant from a continuous interplay between the states, has been continuously shifting attention away from actors and structures to such aspects as discourses and image positioning. In other words, the finality of European boundaries is not given per se, but is constantly negotiated, and the EU therewith remains potentially open to such current "outsiders" as Ukraine & Co., who dream of institutional affiliation under this much praised, magic and panacea-like pan-European umbrella called the European Union. In the eyes of many outside the EU, it is a proved and practice-certified cure for almost all domestic economic ails and political misfortunes of the elite. Such opinions are of special pertinence in the case of Ukraine's EU-policy by three out of four Ukrainian Presidents – L. Kuchma (1994-2005), V. Yushchenko (2005-2010) and V. Yanukovich (2010-?).

The core of realist beliefs concerning enlargement, on the other hand, predicts that the EU expands if enlargement is indispensable and efficient for the purpose of balancing the perceived challenges and threats. Realists presuppose the existence of self-interested and egoistic actors. Neo-liberalists go further by saying that the EU expands if its members expect net absolute gains from enlargement. Moreover, looking at the realism of, for instance, German foreign policy towards Ukraine one can't escape an impression that for some formerly imperial European powers the states which first re-appeared after WWI are still less

legitimate and hence deserving less attention than their former colonizers. Thus France and Germany pay much more heed to the Russian interests and geopolitical considerations than to Ukrainian aspirations, deeds and interests.

### **Realist rebuttal**

Quite irrespective of theoretical approach, Ukraine's attempts to gain concession from the EU concerning membership were met with European concerns over the need to preserve the gains of the European project – be it cultural socialization, relative political cohesion, economic and geopolitical power or hard currency. Internally, the EU's enlargement fatigue has been accompanied by worries that the recent expansion to twenty-seven member states will turn the EU into a bureaucratic monster, unable to make concerted decisions, thus further undermining its democratic legitimacy. Besides, the overstretching across the continent may threaten EU's functionality and durability; hence, many spoke of EU's finality of current political borders. Out of its image and security considerations the EU also used the promise of future membership in order to promote stability along its borders.

The Ukrainian independence coincided with the intensification of European political integration and creation of the European state. Through its discourses of common European house the EU pragmatically meant to give more power to its internal institutions and demolish the obstacles to deeper integration. The need to legitimize these policies in member states called forth the ideological rhetoric of common European destiny, identity, history and values. At the same time Ukraine, like other CIS states, found itself in the transition to nowhere and herewith was denied the possibility to redevelop its (inter)national identity, meant to take into account a new regional perspective, such as the EU's expansion. As a response, the Ukrainian political elite, following the examples of other CEE states, pursued the task of EU-approximation by essentially narrative-rhetorical means with slow and incremental on-the-field progress.

### **The role of common identity and norms**

Over the years the European states came to share a number of norms which created a sense of common "Europeanness" and established the EU as a cooperative arrangement of democratic

and peaceful states. The EU moved in the direction of international laws, rules, transnational cooperation and integration (Manners, 2002; Nicolaïdis and Howse, 2002; Rosecrance, 1998; Smith, 1998). Different types of Europeanization processes created a community based on liberal democratic collective identity (Fierkem and Wiener in Christensen, Jørgensen and Wiener, 2001; Olsen, 2002). As the norm community expands, the attractiveness of becoming part of the community increases (Finnmore and Sikkink 1998).

Molchanov (2007) holds that the end of the bipolar world brought back band-wagoning and politics of regional alliances. It also opened a new promising conduit to procure resources for nation building, political consolidation and international integration. Rhetorical politics of identity appeared well suited to deliver those resources even when regional institutionalization halted from time to time.

The EU has `a historical opportunity to influence domestic policies and international relations in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, contributing to European security and peace` (Hyde-Price in Sío-López, 1996: 211). European Union is primarily interested to develop an international system which is self-regulated by laws and norms, which should help in peaceful development of the international community through trans-national cooperation. This means that the EU policies for the promotion of democracy in Central and East Europe are part of a larger strategy aimed at permanent approximation on the European continent and at the improvement of friendly relationships with surrounding regions. Just as Verheugen emphasised, the debate on enlargement could `easily slip into pure practicalities`, whereas in reality, enlargement was the way to `secure peace and security throughout Europe` and there was `no alternative` (Verheugen, 2000).

The end of the USSR changed political geography of the continent and gave birth to fifteen independent states, which had to find a new way to go and belong to in the face of various economic, identity and security-related dilemmas. Some states, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania being good examples, became able to construct their distinct post-Soviet identities and to market them internationally in pursuit of their interests. International branding by giving the state `an emotional dimension with which people can identify` (van Ham 2001: 2) became the norm of international system. In order to fit the existing identities of the West, East Central Europeans began to define themselves as capitalist, as opposed to formerly socialist (economic identity), democratic, as opposed to party-led (political identity) as well as European, as opposed to `East European` (cultural identity) nations.

In Eastern Europe the political rhetoric concerning the claims of truly European socio-cultural and regional identity became an important diplomatic tool that was used to pave the way to eventual integration with the desired “community of belonging”. It eventually opened the EU doors for all except Ukraine and a couple of misfortunate other. Ukraine tried to emulate the Baltic and CEE practices of exerting soft leverage on EU’s credibility though rhetorical “Europeanness”, but to little avail. The reasons for such apparently cool attitude lied with both the EU and Ukraine, as there was a general lack of positive results from interaction with the Ukrainian ruling elite in the past, whereas the EU lacked the vision, as well as knowledge and understanding of Ukrainian realities. In fact, under the conditions of Kuchma’s authoritarian regime and Russia’s economic grip Ukraine went to its utter-furthest in approaching the EU.

Torn between two centers of gravity, Ukraine was faced with a choice to either side with Moscow or the EU. Russia could offer a bottomless export market for Ukraine’s various industries, at the same time supplying the energy at low prices and offering further security benefits. On the other hand, approximation with NATO and the EU promised stability, prosperity and prestige. Given a stark difference between Ukrainian and Russian socio-political and geopolitical identities the Ukraine eventually became determined to work towards the EU membership. Indeed, Ukraine’s determination to apply for the EU membership dates back to 1993. Since then the Ukrainian elites tried to represent its state as a civilisational ally of the West (Zarycki, 2004).

But Ukraine was tasked with first internalising EU “common values“ by importing, internalising and implementing European norms before the EU adopts a decision on what to offer Ukraine. There are also certain conditions for norm import (Björkdahl 2002). A norm may be imported if it fulfills certain criteria. The intrinsic characteristic of the norm is that it must be considered legitimate by the importing state. It needs to reflect widely shared values and reflect universality of rights and obligations prescribed. Finally, the norm is more likely to be adopted if it fits with the identity and the pre-existing normative structure of the importer, or if such a normative fit can be constructed (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Björkdahl 2002: 62).

Whether the EU acts as a democratisation agent heavily depends on the given country’s integration prospects. Thus the EU directly affects the ‘insiders’ ‘with secure prospects of early membership’, and ‘queuing’ states, where ‘both leverage and response tend to be higher

if more sporadic' (Pravda, 2001: 23). Among the 'outsider' states, the actual EU influence depends on mutual relations and geographic proximity. The EU may exert a 'passive leverage' by the exercise of the power of attraction. Although the idea of a 'return to Europe' may initially be launched as a declarative and symbolic statement, it can have a deeper effect on policy implementation and dominant discourses of political elites.

Indeed, many neo-functionalists mention a powerful socialising role of the EU (Martin and Simmons, 1998). Sociological institutionalists regard the international system as a "cultural" and "institutional" environment structured by inter-subjective cognitions and norms (Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein in Katzenstein, 1996: 33-75). They view rationality as "constructed" or "context-bound" (Nee and Strang, 1998). Consequently, apart from geographic criteria, we can expect the EU to admit all countries that share its collective identity and adhere to its constitutive norms. EU requires its members to be democracies that respect the rule of law and human rights. New members must conform to the Community principles and *acquis communautaire*. The desire to join the European Union conforms to sociological expectations. In this perspective, the "return to Europe", the dominant foreign policy goal of Ukraine, results from a strong identification with Western values and norms. Full EU membership represent for Ukraine the indication of successful transformation into modern European country and recognition of it as being a part of European civilisation.

On the formal level the EU promotes Europeanisation through political dialogue. The EU sought to support institutional change in partner countries through negotiations during regular summits and committee meetings. Generally, the institutionalization of the political dialogue most of times leads to the furthering of democratic transition in plausible EU membership candidates.

### **A short history of interactions**

Below is a formal record of EU-Ukraine interaction (apart from annual summits, numerous meetings, statements, progress evaluations and declarations):

1992 – The first EU-Ukraine top-level meeting between the first President of Ukraine Leonid

Kravchuk and the President of the EC Commission Jacques Delor.

1993 – Opening of the EC Commission Representation in Ukraine.

- 1994 – The Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation between the EU and Ukraine is signed.
- 1995 – The Mission of Ukraine to the European Communities is established.
- 1997 – The first Ukraine-EU summit in Kyiv approved Ukraine's European choice.
- 1998 – Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation (PCA) between Ukraine and the EU comes into force. The Decree of the President of Ukraine approved the Strategy of Ukraine's EU integration.
- 1999 – Adoption of the EU Common Strategy on Ukraine on the EU Helsinki summit.
- 2004 – Adoption of a Strategy Paper on the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).
- 2004 – Approval of the Action Plan for Ukraine by the European Commission.
- 2005 – Endorsement of the EU-Ukraine Action Plan by the EU-Ukraine Cooperation Council.
- 2005 – Granting of the Market Economy Status to Ukraine by the Council of the European Union.
- 2007 – Start of negotiations on the New Enhanced Agreement (NEA), beyond the PCA/  
/Action Plans.
- 2008 – Entrance into force of visa facilitation and readmission agreements.
- 2008 – The launch of free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations and consultations over visa-abolishment for Ukrainians.

The Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA) between the European Community Member States and Ukraine was signed on 14 June 1994 and entered into force on 1 March 1998. The Agreement provided a framework for political relations based on democratic values and dialogue. The PCA's provisions covered goods, services, labour, capital and domestic legislation. The PCA was an important instrument in bringing Ukraine in line with the legal frameworks of the single European market and the GATT/WTO system. The PCA also contained a number of evolutionary clauses, including the prospect of a free trade area.

Further, the agreement provided a framework for wide-ranging co-operation in commercial, industrial, scientific and administrative fields. The PCA highlighted respect for shared fundamental values as an essential element of the EU-Ukraine relationship and supported Ukraine's efforts towards democratic standards.

In December 1999 the Helsinki European Council adopted the EU Common Strategy on Ukraine. The Common Strategy aimed at developing a strategic partnership between the EU and Ukraine on the basis of the PCA, while acknowledging Ukraine's European aspirations and welcoming the country's European choice. The strategy set three principal objectives:

1. to support the democratic and economic transition process in Ukraine;
2. to meet common challenges on the European continent (stability and security in Europe, environment, energy and nuclear safety);
3. to strengthen co-operation between the EU and Ukraine in the context of enlargement (assisting Ukraine's integration into the European and world economy, enhancing co-operation in the field of justice and home affairs).

The EU-Ukraine Action Plan, complemented by the EU Council conclusions, which underlined the EU's commitment to support Ukraine, was endorsed in February 2005. Since its adoption a wide-ranging political dialogue between the EU and Ukraine has been intensified and regular consultations were held at the meetings of the EU-Ukraine summits, Cooperation Council, Ministerial and Committee meetings. Indeed, as it can be inferred from a lengthy record of meetings and declarations, the EU at times looked at Ukraine with certain skepticism, especially during the reign of Kuchma, who effectively de-coupled his foreign policy of intensions from the harsh domestic reality of economic stagnation, rampant cronyism and corruption, harassed press and politically motivated murders, sanctioned from above. With time the idea of Ukraine's "natural place in the European family among other European nations" (Zlenko, 2001) began to irritate European politicians. Even after the Orange Revolution, it took another year to grant Ukraine a market economy status by the EU.

The EU's initial normative promises of common European future and happy, harmonious life fell on fruitful soil in Ukraine. But whereas the CEE states based their Europeanisation

rhetoric on concrete economic and political foundations, the Ukrainians simulated and procrastinated their policy implementation, paying lip service to substance, and hoping, that once in the EU, the reforms will unfold by themselves.

Ukraine has been offered less than the Turkish perspective of membership, as was succinctly put by Romano Prodi in October 2003 in Yalta. Thus the lack of membership prospects reduced the incentive to work towards the European common values. Moreover, the EU's policy towards enlargement and its neighbourhood policy have evoked frustration in Ukraine. Excluding Ukraine from European integration has strengthened anti-European and pro-Russian sentiments. As Kuchma said in April 2001, when he was openly criticized for Gongadze's disappearance and the tape scandal: `The fewer doors are open in Europe for Ukraine, the more Ukraine will cooperate with Russia` (Varfolomeyev, 2002). At the EU-Ukraine summit, held on 8 July 2004 in the Hague, Leonid Kuchma said that the EU's neighborhood policy did not suit Ukraine's interests. He refused to sign the prepared Action Plan for Ukraine within the policy's framework, arguing that he would not sign a document that brings no added value to EU-Ukraine relations. Instead he proposed to take time in order to improve the plan.

Ukraine's half-hearted efforts produced mixed results. Though the country enjoyed a relative economic growth since 2000, the dubious post-Soviet transition by default, and not by design as in other CEE states, produced a legion of rent-seeking interest groups, who effectively prevented Ukraine from reform implementation and coming closer to the EU entry criteria. Thus the circle of reform-emulation and empty talk about eventual joining the EU got only self-reinforced in Ukraine, with corrupt state and interest / lobby groups feeding on each other and keeping the electorate from controlling and steering the country's course. Having failed to coordinate its policies with these of the EU, to act pragmatically and to bargain actively like the rest of CEE, Ukraine, unsurprisingly, earned the reputation of a lame and corrupt duck from the Never-Never-Land, where proclaimed intentions seldom find their way into enforceable law.

### **The pragmatism of European stance**

Kuchma's presidency has also been convenient for the EU, because it has permitted to delay any decision on Ukraine and wait with any coherent strategy towards it. The lack of common

serious strategy eventually led to contradictory statements by the EU on Ukraine. Thus Commission President Romano Prodi in the interview to *Die Volkskrant* in November 2003 ruled out Ukraine as the EU member: 'The fact that Ukrainians or Armenians feel European means nothing to me' (*Die Volkskrant*, 27 November 2003). Three years earlier, however, Prodi was positive on Ukraine's membership. The EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana said at the Warsaw conference in October 2002 that Ukraine is not playing by the rules but playing with the rules (BBC, 16 Oct. 2002). Further, during the conference in Athens in April 2003, President Jacques Chirac said that France would support upgrading Ukraine's status to associate member. EU Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen's views have evolved towards a more "open-door" view: 'it is true that the door cannot remain closed in the long term' (Lobjakas, 2003). Such constant changing of views reflected a lack of any consistent EU strategy towards Ukraine.

A joint German-French report drawn up by their respective foreign ministries in 2000 emphasised that Ukraine could not be allowed to become a member of the EU, as Ukraine's admission would imply Russia's isolation. The then Foreign Minister Borys Tarasiuk, complained that the EU was 'politically indecisive and contradictory', dealing with Ukraine at the level of 'nice declarations only... until now I have not heard a comprehensive explanation from the EU as to what criteria it applies to the countries that aspire to become its members: geographic, economic or political. It is only when things really hurt that the Europeans are ready to make political decisions that should have been made many years ago. As long as nothing dangerous happens in Ukraine, nobody pays attention to it' (Tarasiuk, 2003).

In response to Europe's policies, during the 2004 presidential election campaign in Ukraine the state- and pro-oligarch mass media sought to create a very unattractive image of the EU in the eyes of the Ukrainian electorate. It focused extensively on legal violations, corruption and other imperfections in Europe. It also reported widely on negative impacts of accession on new member states in the EU and on Euro-scepticism across the EU. Additionally, various anti-EU guidelines for journalists were issued by the President's office. As a result the Ukrainians received rather negative information about the EU. Further, the analysis of some TV content showed, that the thesis that Yushchenko represented the interests of the West has been widely exploited. They claimed that Yushchenko as a possible president would turn

voters from Eastern Ukraine into second-class citizens (Solonenko in Kempe and Kurth, 2004).

Generally there has been a certain change in the Ukrainian elite's perception of the *musts* and *does* of the 'European choice'. Initially the size and geographic location of Ukraine were powerful factors in favor of EU support in their own right. The belief that 'Ukraine was too important to fail' mitigated the responsibility of Ukrainian government for implementing political and economic reforms consistent with European standards (Wolczuk, 2004: 7). The opinion held by the Ukrainian elite was that the country is culturally, historically and geographically part of 'Europe', and as such has a natural right to membership (Kuzio, 2003: 19). Quite consistent with this view was the Ukrainian leadership expectation of a 'signal' from the EU in return for a painful reform implementation. Ukrainian rhetoric often placed the obligation for guiding Ukraine's internal reforms on the EU. By the early 2000s, however, there came a growing awareness of the need to become a 'European nation' with adequate democratic and economic standards.

### **Post-2004 dynamics**

Ukraine's European choice was about identity, which was constructed in a symbolic opposition to Eurasia (Molchanov 2007). Though the European integration was since the very independence, in fact, Ukraine's approximation with Europe was deficient from the very beginning. It failed under the first President, Kravchuk, as well as under Kuchma, who didn't substantiate his "European" rhetoric with content. Under Yushchenko things began to look a bit better, as after the Orange events, which underlined the determination of Ukrainian people to join the rest of Europe and legitimized Ukraine's political leadership, the EU could find fewer obstacles to justify any further keeping Ukraine at the Eurasian gate, at least, if considered from a foreign policy perspective. Nevertheless Ukraine's road to Europe looked definitely long and thorny, which resulted in the general feeling of exclusion from this community of belonging.

Slowly, the EU's power of attraction proved to be one of the most powerful tools of indirect influence on democratization in Ukraine. 'Return to Europe' was among the most influential factors, gradually internalized in Ukraine. Indeed, the 'EU factor' was conducive to the governmental efforts to gradually implement reforms, the elite's desire to 'return to Europe',

and development of the pro-European civil society. The EU served as a major reference point and focus for many Ukrainian civil society organizations advocating reforms and promoting European integration.

Besides, the attempts to explain Ukraine – EU persisting distance in cultural terms, which were most vehemently advanced in Ukraine, namely, that Ukraine is not Europe because of Homo Sovieticus remnants largely remaining in place and also Orthodox religion, can now be safely disposed of in the face of EU's incorporation of the Baltic republics, as well as Bulgaria and Romania. These two countries are claimed by many not to have experienced much of industrialisation and conversion from traditionalism. Ukraine, in contrast, was one of the most industrialised fSU republics, especially in its Central, Eastern and Southern parts. The fact that more than one third of total USSR military production was conducted in Ukraine may serve as indirect evidence.

President Yushchenko repeatedly linked Ukraine's future to the European Union: "We are now laying the foundation for our future to create a zone of stability, security and prosperity, which is homogenous with the constantly enlarging European Union and consistent with European norms and standards" (ForUm, 2006). After the Orange revolution the political rhetoric was supplemented with gradual reforms and foreign policy activation. However, foreign policy is a poor substitute for the lack of transparent governance domestically, especially in the context of ongoing corruption scandals since 2005.

In spite of all misfortunes of Ukraine's quest for Europe, the Ukrainian political elite still takes the normative rhetoric of EU officials about Ukraine's "way to Europe" for a golden coin. In reality, this display of EU discourses, so actively propagated in Europe, though having in principle universal application and value, concern only the EU states and plausible candidates with a continuous positive record of adherence to the Copenhagen criteria and stability, but not the poor performers like Ukraine. Therefore Kyiv's potential contribution to the European safety, stability and socio-economic wellbeing did not serve as an important argument so far.

Moreover, Ukraine's one-sided introduction of visa-free travel for the EU citizens in 2005 was taken for granted in European capitals, where this gesture, so uncommon in international relations unfortunately was understood not as a sign of good will, but something to abuse and rhetorically embed into political discourses with no positive policy outcome, also called EU-

talk. Romania, on the other hand, took a more practical approach while joining the EU – it kept visas, payable at the border by the citizens of European states, to the very last. Such realistic policy provided some leeway in hard negotiations with the EU and eventually made mutual concessions possible, whereas Ukraine effectively lost similar leverage tools on its own initiative. The visa facilitation agreement for Ukrainian citizens traveling to the EU, which became valid on 1 January 2008, and is seen as EU’s response to Ukrainian friendly and liberal gestures in kind, in reality only created extra problems for visa applicants, as many Western consulates instead of “facilitating”, on the contrary, restricted visa issuance rules to the brink of the ridiculous.

If considered from a realist perspective, the summer 2008 political crisis caused by the Russia’s expansionist war in Caucasus served as a rare opportunity for the EU to include Ukraine into the list of possible future members. But it seem so only for a short while. European security was substantially threatened and quite in accordance with the theory of realism in international affairs. The EU, as judged even by the rhetoric coming even from Berlin, seemed to sympathise with Ukrainian “closer to Europe – away from Russia”’ cause. But as soon as the fumes of Georgian war evaporated and the ghosts of the new cold war disappeared from the agenda, the EU was quick on its old but reliable horse, further propagating sober realism. Brussels’ change of mind, though, was also partly justified by Yushchenko’s repeated dissolution of Parliament on petty grounds and his public accusations of Prime Minister Tymoshenko concerning “anti-Ukrainian” secret agreements with Moscow.

### **Tentative conclusion**

Kyiv utilised its identity rhetoric as a political resource in the desperate attempt to anchor the country in Western political structures. Indeed discourses over historical identity and cultural roots play an increasingly vital role in global politics. Ukraine’s foreign minister Tarasyuk stated that Ukrainians were no different from “Eastern Germans and other former Warsaw Pact countries...separated from the European mainstream for decades” (Tarasyuk, 2000). Five years later Yushchenko proclaimed that “our place is in the European Union” and “my goal is Ukraine in a United Europe.” (Yushchenko, 2005). Ukraine hoped to use its formal change of elites as a window of opportunity and a handy occasion to use the post-2004 events honeymoon period for opening a qualitatively new chapter in relations with the European

Union. But the institutional development takes considerable time and resources, in which Ukrainian elites are still very reluctant to invest into. Thus in spite of the Orange Revolution the EU nevertheless dismissed Kyiv's speedy requests for an associate membership, offering instead a wider version of neighbourhood policy.

So far the practice of EU - Ukraine approximation in terms of political realities is rather deficient. The EU's stance on Ukraine can also be described as escapism – a mental “escape” from the perceived unpleasant deliberation of future inclusion of Ukraine. By the way, this term is also used to define the actions taken to relieve the feelings of depression. As we can see, Europe has not given up Ukraine yet, on the contrary, it tries (somewhat reluctantly though) to put Ukraine on the right track through the dialogue at least.

Ukraine has espoused “European choice” rhetoric and the aim of integration into the EU while adopting domestic policies that undermined these goals. The EU placed the onus of moving closer to its “common values” on Ukraine without making any offer of future membership. Ukraine has responded by demanding a decisive signal from the EU. But Kuchma's relative ambivalence towards EU membership from 2003 on, for instance, had a rather tactical than strategic importance – it was the continuation of his renowned multi-vector approach and realist response to Europe's criticism of his policies. Such change of mind of the Ukrainian president could be explained by various domestic factors, such as regional diversity, large number of Russian speakers, competing foreign orientations and economic dependency on Russia.

The Ukrainian case is thus a mixture of constructivist and realist approaches. Kyiv remains adamant in its claims to European civilization, currently personified by the European Union, whereas Brussels is only incremental in loosening its realist grip on its Ukraine-policy. Let us hope that it will not take yet another war in Europe, before the EU can decide in favour of Ukraine...

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