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# UKRAINE'S NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY TOWARDS V4 COUNTRIES:

# PROMOTING BETTER UNDERSTANDING

2019

This policy research is devoted to the analysis of the relations between Ukraine and its neighbouring V4 countries as well as to provide policy recommendations for the improvement of the neighbourhood relations.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recently Ukraine finds itself in a more complicated international environment. This not only includes an ongoing conflict with Russia, with Crimea and parts of Eastern Ukraine being occupied; but also new challenges in relations with virtually all other Ukraine's neighbors.

These challenges are driven by two primary sets of factors. One of them deals with regional trends and recent developments, and the other with internal social and political transformations in Ukraine. In Central Europe a rise of nationalism, weakening of democracy, and deterioration of regional security define current major developments and affect relations among regional powers. In Ukraine an intensive process of nation-building triggers more attention to historic narratives, symbols, and language and also favors nationalism. Accompanied by massive migration, this generates a more national-focused political agenda not only in Ukraine, but also in neighboring countries, which leads to surfacing of old conflicts. Quarrels over history and language go hand in hand with partnership in areas of security and energy – which altogether creates a complicated pattern of current politics in the region.

Three countries of V4 border Ukraine. Relations between Ukraine and Slovakia come closest to the notion of strategic partnership, with both countries sharing assessment of the threat carried by the Russian revisionism, close looks on the future of European security, and common interests in energy transit and supplies. At the same time, Ukraine's relations with Poland and, even more, with Hungary became somewhat more troublesome.

With Poland a resurrection of an old historic debate, reinforced by internal political agenda, has been observed. Hungary has heavily criticized steps taken by Kyiv in its language policy, specifically towards Hungarian minority in the country.

These developments are taking place in a regional context, characterized by the threat of further destabilization. Russia's aggressive steps, having resulted in occupation of Crimea from Ukraine and engagement into the conflict in Donbas, undermined security in Europe significantly. International institutions, including multilateral ones, have been weakened. Soft security has been overshadowed by hard one. EU's instruments of security and foreign policy, including Eastern Partnership project, turned ineffective. Under such conditions, conflicts among regional powers seem even more dangerous.

In order to limit their scope and create a more favorable environment for resolution we suggest several steps. First, countries should discourage aggressive rhetoric towards each other in internal political discourses. Second, they should enhance on mutually beneficial issues and try to develop common approaches. These would include areas of regional security, energy security, and transnational issues. Third, they should pay more attention to sustaining democracy in the region. And finally, they would be better off if consider ways of mutual protection of ethnic minorities.

# WHAT IS HAPPENING IN UKRAINE'S RELATIONS WITH ITS WESTERN NEIGHBORS?

Quite unexpectedly relations between Ukraine and its neighbors to the West have deteriorated in recent years. Deterioration has been caused by a number of issues, mostly at the regional level.

Two out of three V4 countries neighboring Ukraine has seen their relations with Kyiv becoming more troublesome: Poland and Hungary.

When one thinks of Polish-Ukrainian relations, history immediately comes to mind. It is a long record which impacts current policies of both countries in numerous ways.

On the one hand, turbulent and complicated history of both nations in the XX century is a part of collective memory in both countries, something witnessed by people at the distance of two-three generations. Epochal events at the end of World War I have been interconnected with struggle for independence of both Poland and Ukraine on the remnants of former large European empires. The results were different, for a number of reasons, but along the way several dramatic episodes – like clashes over Lviv or joint struggle against Soviet Russia, ended with the Riga Agreement in 1921 - took place, and they continue to shape mutual perception of Poles and Ukrainians. Events of the interwar period and especially during the Second World War II gave rise to a new round of complications, involving deep emotional reactions overethnic cleansing, war crimes and deportations that occurred in this period. This history is close. It still brings back memories and thus is a part of political processes in both countries and a factor of policies of them towards each other.

A more distant history normally dated back to times of ancient Rus' (Ruthenia) and Polish Kingdom under Piast dynasty, is also affecting the way both states perceive each other. History generates myths and symbols, creates narratives, and after all impacts identities. Over this long period Poles and Ukrainians went through the period of joint statehood, rivalry and wars between each other. They have been united and divided by issues of religion, language, rights, and borders. Problems like those are typical for neighboring countries in Europe, however for Poland and Ukraine the situation has been complicated further due to fact that ancestors of contemporary Poles and Ukrainians were living in the same state entities (Polish Kingdom, later Austrian and Russian Empire) throughout the period lasting – depending on the region – between one and six centuries. Quarrels and division lines between Poles and Ukrainians were utilized or created/enforced by powerful neighbors.

Recent history provided a new chance for constructing trustful and mutually beneficial bilateral relations, and the countries have taken it. They share common vision of regional security concerns, enjoy mutual support on a number of issues, and consider each other strategic partners.

Already in 1992 Poland and Ukraine signed a Treaty on good neighborhood, friendship and cooperation. Two years later declaration on the principles of mutual relations has also been signed, underlining strategic importance of the countries for each other. Focus of bilateral relations in the 1990-ies has mostly been on economy, trade, and history. Sides managed to reach considerable degree of reconciliation, driven by the formula "remember the past, but think about the future".

Due to concentration of both Warsaw and Kyiv on issues other than history, it even seemed to work for some time. Ukraine was concerned about reforms and state building, while Poland set agenda for joining NATO and the EU. It seemed like problematic issues of history have been finally overcome.

Poland played an important role in events of the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine in 2004. Polish and Ukrainian Presidents usually enjoyed good interpersonal communication. The case of Aleksander Kwasniewski and Leonid Kuchma was especially important given the political crisis in Ukraine in 2004-2005. "Orange Revolution" brought pro-Western political forces to power in Ukraine, and being more pro-Western in that case implied closer friendship with Poland, which was considered as one of Ukraine's best friends in Europe. The image of Poland advocating for Ukraine in the EU was extremely popular among Ukrainians at that time.

This advocacy survived even when Ukraine took a more pro-Russian turn in its foreign policy under President Victor Yanukovych. Warsaw has been very active in promoting EU's Eastern Partnership in general and Association Agreement between EU and Ukraine in particular. The Cox-Kwasniewski mission has been established in 2012 to handle consequences of "selective justice", an issue which has been damaging Ukrainian-European dialogue since jailing of Yulia Tymoshenko. After events of Euromaidan relations between Poland and Ukraine regained some optimism. However optimism has been significantly undermined by consequences of the politics of memory, implemented by the post-Maidan Ukrainian authorities as well as conservative Polish government – these measures increased a conflict of historical memory, involving Polish and some segments of the Ukrainian public opinion and unleashing extensive emotions. Long-term implications of Kremlin's steps in Ukraine have been clearly felt both in Kyiv and Warsaw. A strategic partnership required modification of the agenda.

The relations between Ukraine and Hungary are a textbook example of the crisis, in which neither party considers actions to be acceptable, while both overestimate their capabilities and underestimate the risks and losses associated with the conflict. For more than a year there are sharp controversies, the trigger for which was the

new Law on Education, which was adopted by the Ukrainian parliament on September 5, 2017.

The Hungarian reaction, which initially concerned the protection of the rights of the minority and the territory of Ukraine to receive education in the Hungarian language, quickly spread to the questions of Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine, citizenship and political cooperation. The conflict has reached a high level, it has acquired signs of scandal and, seems, it has the potential for further deepening. It is precisely to be said that both countries should prepare for a long cooling period and mutual distrust.

The relations between Hungary and Ukraine had much better time. Neighbors, united by common issues and challenges in the area of security, geography and history, have long remained friends. Hungary was one of the first to recognize Ukraine's independence, and subsequently became one of the key regional partners. Political cooperation deepened after Hungary joined NATO and the EU, and Ukraine made European and Euro-Atlantic vectors a priority in its foreign policy.

However, at some point the situation began to change. Hungarians began to concentrate additional attention on the rights of ethnic minorities in neighboring states; Ukrainians began to develop a national identity against the backdrop of Crimean occupation and armed conflict in the eastern part of the country. In both states, speculation on the historical and national themes began to be used high demand; while in the region of Central Europe the right political ideas and forces have intensified. The low level of economic interdependence and trade was due to: the benefits of hostility dominated the existing benefits from cooperation. Hungary as a member of NATO and the EU received additional levers of pressure on Ukraine, which made membership in both organizations a priority of their foreign policy. Even without any "Kremlin hand" there were enough motives for both sides to raising rates.

Escalation occurred quickly and predictably. Following the adoption of the Law on Education in new edition by the Verkhovna Rada, which narrowed the right of ethnic minorities to acquire education in their native language, Budapest

promised to block Ukraine's further rapprochement with NATO and the EU. A practical step in this direction was the obstruction of the work of the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC) at the highest level. Subsequently, the Hungarian government scheduled the appointment of "an authorized minister responsible for the development of Transcarpathia and develop kindergartens in the Carpathian basin", which provoked strong protests from the official Kyiv.

However, the loudest scandal for today was the distribution of Hungarian passports in the Consulate of Hungary in Berehove, which got on the video. After this incident, which was described by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Vasyl Bodnar as "that Hungary behaves as if Transcarpathia were its territory", Ukraine sent out a Hungarian consul, and Hungary replied symmetrically. The distribution of Hungarian passports in Transcarpathia lasts at least since 2011, but it is the peculiarities of the current perception of the parties that exacerbate the situation.

Of course, the reactions of both parties are conditioned by the logic of the already existing confrontation, and each step is perceived to be extremely hostile, while the actions and intentions of the other party cause the maximum suspicion. In this atmosphere of mutual distrust, the next crisis moment remains a matter of time.

Today, relations between Hungary and Ukraine are in a state of crisis, and in the near future this crisis will deepen rather than be resolved. Budapest reaction was resolute, demonstrative and well thought out to Ukraine's adoption of the new edition of the Law on Education. Ukraine's response to the rhetoric did not slow down, and very quickly the parties came to a standstill of mutual accusations and threats. Can Kyiv and Budapest afford the luxury of a long-lasting conflict in the current geopolitical situation?

It looks like they can. You can even benefit from it if you have certain skills. Confrontation with neighbors is a powerful and cheap factor for internal mobilization, which will be pleased to use by Hungarian and Ukrainian politicians who are prone to populism. However, the weakening of the international positions of both states will be a price. For Ukraine, such a relaxation looks more undesirable, as in general, Ukraine's position in the conflict with Hungary seems weaker. We are certainly bigger, but Hungary can effectively use its membership in the EU and NATO as a tool of pressure.

If things are going to continue, then further deployment of events can be conventionally called "collision of identities". It will be less scale than in the clash of civilizations, but in all other parallels will be justified. Identities will be based on symbolic elements, opposition to neighbors, mythologization and heroism of their own history. As a result, it will expand cultural divides, reducing the chances of a future dialogue. Ukrainians and Hungarians are at risk of speaking shortly in different languages - not only in linguistic but also in meaningful terms.

To a certain extent, both countries have become hostage to regional processes, in particular the growing influence of nationalism as a political ideology. The region of Central and Eastern Europe was in the center of mood and emotion, inherent in the period of a century ago. Then the collapse of the empires and the emergence of new states provoked the race for identity: the countries of the region created national myths and overcome the severe consequences of the First World War.

Today, the challenge is to find ways to avoid identity collisions and to implement a more optimistic scenario under the so-called "modus vivendi". Such a scenario would provide for the possibility of coexistence with differences, dialogue from different positions and a joint search for mechanisms to protect each other's interests.

On the other hand, relations of Ukraine with Slovakia are so far free from misunderstandings, conflicts, and hostilities. Slovakian-Ukrainian relations may be best described by words "pragmatic" and "balanced". They are free from historical burden, ideological sentiments, and geopolitical speculations. At the same time partnership is driven by complimenting interests, most importantly in security and energy areas. Slovakia is believed to be one of Ukraine's best friends in the EU, while Ukraine is an opportunity for Slovakia to play a more active role in the region. Russian factor shouldn't be discounted: the two countries treat Russia differently. For Ukraine Russia is a primary security threat while for Slovakia it is often an opportunity and a long-term partner.

There are also points of conflict, disagreement, and concern, as it is always the case between neighbors. These points mostly deal with smuggling and illegal trafficking, policies towards Russia, and corruption. At the same time, Slovakia and Ukraine enjoy bilateral relations free of scandals and distrust. These relations are getting very close to a notion of strategic partnership. Sharing just 97 km of border, the two countries are good neighbors and trustful friends.

Both Slovakia and Ukraine are new states, which emerged as results of geopolitical shifts in Europe following the end of the Cold War. Both states spent opening years of independence in attempts to build effective states institutions, introduce economic and political reforms, and define major vectors of foreign policies. For Slovakia the center of gravity has been westward, with Vienna in 55 km of distance, Prague in 291 km, and Kyiv more than thousand km far away.

On the other hand, Slovakia has been paying much attention in its foreign policy to Russia, which is the supplier of energy resources, a huge market, and an important factor of regional (in)stability. In first decade of independence relations with Russia were much more important to Bratislava, than those with Ukraine, given the intensity of trade, mutual investment and political contacts on the highest level.

Both countries have been transit states for Russian natural gas and oil supplies to Europe. However, the emphases of their energy strategy have been different. Ukraine was struggling for diversification of supplies and access to Caspian energy. Slovakia was solidifying its role as a regional hub for Russian gas and oil supplies. At some point Slovakia supported the Jamal-2 project, aimed

at constructing a gas pipeline through territories of Belarus, Poland, and Slovakia. The pipeline was bypassing Ukrainian territory and thus has been perceived by Kyiv as a threat to Ukrainian security. The two countries have previously often been competing rather than cooperating in energy sphere.

They have also been competing on a political level. Ukraine from time to time has been obsessed with ideas of regional leadership, while Slovakia has been involved into the Visegrad Group (V4), which aimed at advancing interests of and cooperation among Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia (later Czech Republic and Slovakia). The Visegrad Group survived the breakup of Czechoslovakia and accession of all member-states to NATO and EU. Today it looks like an effective instrument for enhancing interests of the member-states both within the European Union and regionally – much more effective than anything offered by Ukraine in the past.

At some point the two countries also had some discrepancies over visa regime. Visas have been introduced for Ukrainians by the Slovak government in 2000, as a part of preparation for joining the EU. At the same time Poland introduced visas for Ukrainians only in 2003 – and from the point of view of Kyiv, the Slovakian step was made too early. Ukraine responded with introducing visa regime for Slovaks and denouncing the readmission treaty with Slovakia.

Slovakia joined NATO and EU in 2004, the same year Ukraine was going through the "Orange Revolution". At that moment it seemed that both countries could work together to foster Ukraine's accession to Western institutions. Slovakia, due to economic and security considerations, was in favor of Ukraine's closer association with the West. Bur further developments postponed this perspective for some time.

"Forgotten neighbor" was very often a way to refer to Ukraine in Slovakia. In the beginning of the 1990-ies Bratislava has been betting on Moscow's support in getting independence from Prague and paid little attention to a former Soviet republic. Kyiv, in its turn, has been much more concerned with settling issues inherited from the former USSR, e.g. shaping relations with Russia, including over the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, and defining conditions and terms of Ukraine's non-nuclear status.

Parties may have been underachieving in bilateral performance. Geography, history and social connections provided much more potential for cooperation. Concerned with their problems of transition and state-building, the two countries have often seen each other through the Russian or post-Soviet prism.

# V4 COUNTRIES IN UKRAINE'S FOREIGN POLICY

As a grouping, V4 is very important for Ukraine on a regional level of its foreign policy. Individually, relations with member-states are among the most important bilateral commitments of Ukraine.

Polish-Ukrainian relations fully reflect strategic complexities, social interconnection, and cultural context of the recent century in the history of Central and Eastern Europe. Driven by security considerations and mutual desire for closer partnership – or even alliance – these relations have not escaped series of conflicts and misunderstandings. A neighborhood with a tremendous potential remains vulnerable, this time not so much due to big powers' games, but because of modified regional context and internal political developments.

Poland was the first state to recognize Ukraine's independence in 1991. Both states perceive each other as strategic partners, and such a perception survived almost thirty years of ups-and-downs in international environment and internal political transformations in both countries. The stance of bilateral relations between them continues to be one of the key factors to overall regional stability.

Durability of current strategic partnership between Poland and Ukraine rests on shared understanding of security challenges in Central and Eastern Europe. Despite the fact that Poland and Ukraine find themselves in quite different strategic settings – Poland is a member to EU and NATO, while Ukraine is not – they both perceive Russian revisionism as a considerable threat. Common history of being victims to powerful neighbors contributes into this.

Thus, security issues play the most important role in bilateral agenda. Already before 2014 both countries were aware of significance of reliable, stable, and predictable cooperation. Poland was the key initiator of the Eastern Partnership project in 2008, aimed at securing EU's eastern neighborhood and brining six target countries closer to European standards. Much has changed since then: in 2008 soft security issues seemed dominant, and normative power of the EU was designed to handle them best. Today hard power and military force play bigger role in regional security arrangements and EU's normative power is not enough to tackle new risks.

While continuing to advocate EU's deeper involvement into Central and Eastern Europe's security concerns, Poland is also relying on a more active role of NATO. Warsaw hosted NATO summit in 2016, which agreed a Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine as well as deployment of NATO multinational battalions in Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – both steps were welcome by Kyiv. Poland consistently claims that doors of NATO should be open for Ukraine. Along with that Poland remains one of the key providers of military assistance to Ukraine, taking part in joint exercises and trainings. A Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian brigade – LITPOLUKRBRIG – has been operational since 2016.

Poland is Ukraine's second biggest trading partner (and the biggest in terms of export)[1], while Ukraine ranks 14th in the list of major trading partners of Poland. There is a huge potential for mutual trade, and this can be a basis of a deepened interdependence. Association Agreement signed between Ukraine and EU has provided additional boost and space for bilateral trade.

[1] http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2019/zd/ztt/ztt_u/ztt0219_u.htm

Recently the issue of Ukrainian migrants to Poland has become especially vibrant. In 2017 Ukrainians received about 81% of all Polish working visas, while the total number of Ukrainians working in Poland is estimated between one and 2 million. Polish dynamic economy profits from supplies of Ukrainian labor, while Ukrainians get an access to higher salaries in Poland. Over 3 billion USD was the total value of Ukrainians' remittances in Poland[2]. Due to not only linguistic, cultural, and social closeness, but also liberal legislature, Poland has become the leading destination for Ukrainian labor force.

At the same time, this issue requires careful management in order to minimize risks of negative perception of Ukrainians in Poland and demonstrations of xenophobia. Increased migration flow between Ukraine and Poland, partly due to liberalization of the visa regime with the EU, also raises the issue of border control and trans-border cooperation.

Positions of Poland and Ukraine are close regarding energy security in Europe. Diversification of natural gas supplies, securing transit of Russian gas through Ukraine's territory, opening of European markets for LNG from the US seem to be in both countries' interests. In 2015 Poland has completed an LNG terminal and by 2022 it is planning to set the Baltic Pipe, opening access to Norwegian gas, operational. This would enable Poland to discontinue natural gas supplies from Russia, which currently comprise about two thirds of overall natural gas supplies. Poland and Ukraine are strongly against the Nord Stream-2 project due to its negative impact on Ukraine's security. Polish energy company PGNiG has also arranged natural gas supplies to Ukraine at a level of 200 million cubic meters in 2018-2019.

At the same time, history continues to play a role in bilateral relations. Recently several steps have been taken by both Poland and Ukraine to make situation worse. In April, 2015 the Ukrainian Parliament adopted the so-called "decommunization laws", which envisage responsibility of those who deny heroic nature of fighters for Ukraine. This step has been perceived negatively by Warsaw, the effect multiplied given the laws have been adopted the

same day when the President of Poland gave a speech in the Ukrainian Parliament, stressing that Poland wants good relations with Ukraine. In 2016 the Polish Parliament unanimously adopted the resolution which qualifies Volhynia killings as genocide of the Poles. In 2017 Ukraine banned Poland's exhumation works on its territory in response to deconstruction of a monument to UPA (Ukrayinska Povstanska Armiya) in Hruszowice, Poland. In 2018 the Polish Parliament adopted amendments to the Bill on the Polish Institute of National Remembrance, enabling criminal responsibility for denial of "crimes of Ukrainian nationalists" in 1925-1950 – the law was recognized as anticonstitutional by Poland's Constitutional Court in 2019.

Ukrainian-Hungarian relations are also affected by history. Both Ukraine and Hungary have a difficult past, full of dramas and injuries, and the past has a strong influence on the ways of forming and developing national identities and perceptions of relations with neighbors. Briefly, this effect can be called a "battle of syndromes".

In Hungary, this syndrome is called "Trianon". After losing World War I Hungary, under the terms of the Treaty of Trianon of 1920, lost more than two-thirds of its territory and more than half of the population, and Hungarians ethnic minority with a total of more than three million people found themselves within the borders of neighboring states. Within Hungary, the difficult conditions of peace were perceived as a national tragedy, which greatly contributed to the formation of a revanchist foreign policy between the World Wars. After the end of the Second World War, the territory of Hungary as a whole was preserved within the framework defined by the terms of the Treaty of Trianon. And although the "Trianon syndrome" today should not be compared to what was in the 1920s-1930s, when the state flags dropped to mourn for the signed agreement, but it continues to exist in the public consciousness and, most importantly, used by political forces for easy and quick conquest of public support. Ethnic minorities of Hungarians in neighboring countries - and most of them are 1.5 million minority in Romania - are an important part of the "Trianon syndrome". In the modern world, where the review

2  https://bank.gov.ua/doccatalog/document?id=20008703

of the state borders is an extremely expensive, ineffective, rare and dubious matter for frank and cynical revisionists, the protection of the rights of ethnic minorities becomes the main instrument of ethnocentric politics, a kind of contemporary analogue of irredentist. The concept of "great Hungary" during the period between the World Wars envisaged the gathering of territories; today, instead of it, there is the option of a state policy of active support for national minorities in neighboring states.

Ukraine has its own syndromes. They do not have such an obvious historical point of origin, but they are also related to historical memory, the struggle for statehood and the construction of national identity. Perhaps, at the moment, such syndromes as Crimea, Donbas or even Budapest, under the name of a well-known memorandum, are being formed, which in the future will affect Ukrainians' perceptions of history, neighbors and their own destinies in Europe. One way or another, these syndromes affect the decision both within the state and in relation to neighbors.

The development of national identity on the basis of ethnosymbolism - with the use of linguistic, religious markers and historical symbols - with the heroization of certain periods of history and rethinking of historical mistakes - poses additional risks of exacerbating relations with neighbors. And if these neighbors also take decisions under the influence of historical memories, then such risks are doubling. Along with identity issues, Hungary remains important regional trading partner of Ukraine, as well as an ally in issues of energy security.

Balancing – is what perhaps Ukraine and Slovakia do often in bilateral relations. Ukraine today is balancing off Russian influence, tackling tensions with its other Western neighbors, which also are Slovakia's partners in V4 group, and looking for a new modus operandi with the EU. Slovakia

attempts to find a balanced approach to deny Russia's revisionist policy, assist Ukraine, preserve regional security, and enhance its own interests. The way reverse gas supplies had been arranged to Ukraine from Slovakia – a step considered to be decisive for bilateral relations by most Ukrainian experts – could be an example of implementing such a policy of balancing. In 2014 Slovakia started to supply EU natural gas through Vojany-Uzhhorod pipeline, which at maximum of about 44 million cubic meters a day is capable of covering about 20%% of Ukraine's consumption. It played a critical role then and continues to be an important factor of Ukraine's energy security.

However, even this issue hasn't been completely smooth. In 2014-2015 Ukraine was insisting on a so-called "big reverse flow", which would enable larger amounts of gas to be transported from Europe to Ukraine. Operating Slovak company Eustream was accused by Ukrainian side of making an agreement with the Russian giant Gazprom, which would disable "big reverse flow" of natural gas to Ukraine. At the same time it became clear that the volume of gas delivered by the Vojany-Uzhgorod pipeline is dependent on the volume of gas purchased by Ukraine from Russia. The two parties – Slovakia and Ukraine – spent some time blaming each other, which had a negative impact on mutual trust in both capitols.

More generally, events in and around Ukraine impact the way Slovakia perceives its national security and regional security arrangements. They help reconsider the role Russia plays in the region, obviously making smaller states perceive Moscow's political aspirations with more realism. They also enhance reevaluation of the role of NATO in regional security and stimulate discussions over security capacities of the European Union. In short, the whole architecture of the regional security has been rearranged. One of the consequences of such a rearrangement has been the appearance of new initiatives, such as the Three Seas Initiative, to which Slovakia is a member.

Issue of ethnic minorities has traditionally been important for bilateral relations. There is Ukrainian diaspora in Slovakia, totaling about 55 thousand according to census of 2001, but estimated by some experts as double that number. Eastern Slavs in Slovakia often identify themselves not as Ukrainians, but as Rusyns, speaking a language of their own, which resembles Ukrainian, but is a different one. Composition of Ukrainians in Slovakia constantly varies, with some people gaining Slovak national identification, while balance of Ruthenians and Ukrainians is also shifting. Ruthenians and Ukrainians are a part of bilateral agenda. In 1995 a mechanism for dealing with minorities' issues has been bilaterally agreed upon.

A traditional issue of concern has been smuggling. A tunnel for delivering goods (primarily cigarettes) from Ukraine to Slovakia, airplanes, hang gliders and drones for same purposes, bribes and crimes are characteristic features of the problem. An average quantity of cigarettes, illegally delivered from Ukraine to Slovakia is estimated at 5 billion per year. Along with cigarettes drugs are also main item of illegal trade, and those go both ways. In addition, the channel is used by illegal immigrants. Tackling smuggling is a top priority.

The Czech Republic, not a neighbor of Ukraine, fully supports Ukraine's territorial integrity and provides a wide range of support, both within V4 initiatives and individually. Relations between the two countries are no very close, with various political forces in the Czech Republic advocating more pro-Russian policy, than Ukrainians would want. Prague has been among the last to ratify the Association Agreement between EU and Ukraine.

# REGIONAL SECURITY CONTEXT

Russia's active revisionist policy in Europe and beyond is generating new reality on the ground in real-time mode. It turns out that not so much President Putin has lost touch with reality, but rather his vision and perception of the reality is being actively imposed over European political agenda. Politics is not only about material factors, but also ideas and perceptions. An ability to shape agenda and reframe values is an important power asset. The way this asset is being currently used undermines European security.

The European security system is seriously damaged in several important ways. Each of them alone is a serious challenge. Cumulative effect goes far beyond the impact of any other crisis had had since the end of the Cold War. First of all, fundamental

principles of international law are openly violated. The annexation of the Crimea from Ukraine breaches UN Charter, Helsinki Final Act, as well as Russian-Ukrainian Treaty of 1997, the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, and a number of other international treaties. As an open act of aggression, it contradicts the non-use of force principle and violates territorial integrity of a neighboring state. To put it short, Russian aggression puts under question almost every single legal foundation of the current world order.

Secondly, Russia's steps have undermined effectiveness of international norms, regimes, and organizations. To operate effectively they all need stable rules and principles, which are by now under question. Helplessness of the UN, as well as a

limited effectiveness of regional organizations, most notably OSCE, is the immediate result of the regional security crisis. A more long-term effect would significantly erode mutual trust among European actors.

Thirdly, revisionism carries on its own alternative agenda. By undermining well-known principles and norms of European politics, Russia is putting forward its own vision, which could be shortly labeled Realpolitik. It implies spheres of influence, balance of power, and principle of self-help. If installed, it will take European politics back to mechanisms and instruments of the 19th century.

Revisionism is quickly bringing about perceptional changes. International actors will have to adapt their expectations, goal-setting, priorities, and general political approaches to new realities. In short, they will have to shift paradigms of security policy.

Until recently European security has been largely operating under neoliberal and neofunctional theoretical umbrellas. They implied high level of interdependence, long-term cooperation, and institutionalized partnership as foundations for international security. From a neoliberal point of view, complex interdependence of international actors is capable of partly overcoming international anarchy and thus ameliorating security dilemma, a triggering mechanism of most international conflicts. When states cooperate repeatedly, they build links of mutual dependence and institutionalize them through international norms and regimes. That means that under conditions of repeated partnership, international actors pursue absolute gains and thus can trust each other even remaining essentially egoistic agents. Cooperation becomes a dominant interest in such a system, while international security is maintained through a network of international regimes and norms.

In some cases, as neofunctionalism argues, a deepened cooperation may result in processes of integration. They can spillover to various spheres and, in particular, into political and security area. This brings about erosion of state sovereignty and forming of supra-national institutions. The European integration process is an example of such post-Westphalian politics.

European security has been constructed mostly along these neoliberal and neofunctional lines. Mutual trust, absolute gains, repeated cooperation have been key elements of the security environment. Use of force, arms races, intimidation and blackmail did not pay off and have been mostly marginalized.

Now all that is changing. Direct application of military force combined with a highly revisionist political agenda transforms the very conceptual foundations of security. These transformations are best reflected by "good old" realist paradigm.

Realism holds that states with their egoistic national interests are key agents of international politics. They struggle for security, power, and influence in a highly competitive and hostile environment. Military, strategic, and political realms are most prioritized among all other possible areas of cooperation or competition. In a world like this cooperation becomes a tough choice. Before engaging into it a state must define how exactly it wants mutual gains to be divided. Since today's partner could be tomorrow's adversary, any state would like to get a bigger share of mutual gain. This, in turn, would lead to states' concentration on relative, rather than absolute gains. Since getting a bigger share is more important than getting any share at all, long-term cooperation under realpolitik thinking becomes limited. International norms and institutions, which arise from such cooperation, also lose their power. International politics gets back to the state of anarchy. Security dilemma will reemerge as the most powerful driving force behind security policies of the states. It will make states spend more on defense and boost containment strategies. Raise of mistrust and worst-case scenario thinking will follow. All in all, balance of power mechanism will become the only effective one for maintaining security.

But that would be something quite opposite to what the EU has been aiming. Instead of European security rooted in mutual benefit, common norms, and interdependence, an old-fashioned balance of power system will emerge, making current security instruments and arrangements obsolete.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## POLISH-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS

In a mid-term perspective history will most likely remain the main issue of concern in bilateral relations. Gradually it moved from academic into political sphere once again and is likely to remain there for some time. Appeals to history are not just short-term and related to specific political parties or leaders. It is a part of broad and deep process with a high level of interdependence.

Nation building, inspired in Ukraine by Russia's aggression, concentrates on ethno-symbolic elements, including language, religion, symbols, and historical narratives. By putting more emphasis on history, it triggers similar processes in neighboring countries, including Poland. Moreover, there are other factors, contributing into another wave of nationalism in the region. Rise popularity of right-wing parties and increased attention to history on the part of political forces are going to become key features of political landscape in the countries of the region. That gives additional impetus to long-lasting Polish-Ukrainian quarrels over history.

Political dimension of historical clashes is going to remain in bilateral relations. So far it does not look like that elites of both states are ready for significant revision of their approaches towards the history, including its usage of the history for political purposes. Moreover, it might be even politically profitable for both elites to engage into quarrels over narratives and national symbols. But in the long run a certain level of trust and readiness to accept different views on history would let both states be better off. Focusing on more pragmatic

issues and allowing pluralistic interpretations of history on the state level can be a good starting point.

Security should be kept in focus. Poland and Ukraine should realistically assess interests of each other, and Ukrainians must understand the differences in perceiving challenges. Poland is in a much better position than Ukraine, and has a different security agenda. Ukraine should seek for pragmatic partnership rather than ideologically driven friendship. There is a huge space for that: both countries readily accept each other as strategic partners and friends and have no reasons for major confrontations. Ukraine may help Poland increase the importance of Eastern neighborhood in EU's common policies, while Poland may further support Ukraine on its way to EU and NATO membership.

Regional security initiatives may also become platforms for bilateral cooperation. Putting Ukraine higher on the agenda of Visegrad Group and Three Seas Initiative might be mutually beneficial.

Same can be said about joint efforts aimed at enhancing energy security in the region. Diversification of natural gas supplies, expanding opportunities for liquefied natural gas deliveries, and improving energy efficiency are priorities for both countries.

Poland and Ukraine have enough potential combined to impact regional political developments and put forward a new security agenda. This agenda should be realistic and take into account current political and geopolitical realities. Effective containment of the Russian threat, more attention from the EU and NATO to Eastern Europe, more

infrastructural capabilities, and less mistrust or historical speculations could bring about a more secure neighborhood.

At the same time, issues connected to national identities, including conflicts over history, are not likely to disappear.. Counterweighing identity issues with mutually beneficial cooperation in various spheres, introducing regional projects which would enhance joint efforts, concentrating on multilateral regional formats would help minimize risks of another wave of nationalism in the Central and Eastern Europe.

Attention should also be paid to improving democratic institutions. The task is crucial for Ukraine, which continuously falls into the "hybrid regime" group in EIU Democracy Index, but also important for other countries in the region, including Poland. More democracy would mean less internal conflicts, more power-sharing, and better protection for minorities – benefits, which any state of the region would welcome.

# HUNGARIAN-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS

Both Hungary and Ukraine lose the continuation and exacerbation of the conflict. Ukraine gets absolutely unnecessary problems on its western frontiers and additional brakes in further rapprochement with NATO and the EU. Hungary also runs the risk. The sanctions against Budapest, which are discussed within the EU, are extremely unlikely, but the image of a country lacking European values will not benefit Hungary in the future. At the same time ethnic minorities - Hungarians in Ukraine and Ukrainians in Hungary - instead of the most complete protection of their interests, they receive additional risks.

To overcome the logic of confrontation, complex and non-standard decisions are required. Simple formulas, such as "to leave history for historians" from a similar Ukrainian-Polish conflict, will not work. Conflicts of this kind contain too many politics to rely on historians. It is unlikely that the hopes for interdependence will be justified, that is, the common economic interests will prevail over the motives behind the escalation of inter-ethnic confrontation. Hungary's share in Ukraine's foreign trade is about 3%, while Ukraine's share in Hungary's foreign trade is roughly halved. Therefore, the formula for a successful solution should be based on a political component.

One of the possible ways could be the creation of a wider regional context. If we realize that Ukraine and Hungary are part of a single region, establishing cooperation and maintaining a common consent in which could significantly expand the capabilities of both countries, then the level of escalation of the conflict can be kept under control. The regional level can open new horizons for both states if they can get out of captivity thinking only by today's categories.

In Ukraine, you often hear references to the "Kremlin hand" and the fact that Ukraine's conflicts with its neighbors are in the interests of Moscow. Such an argument is unlikely to be convincing for Budapest: only 6% of Hungarians consider the threat of possible escalation or expansion of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. It is best to bet on the argument that a bilateral conflict undermines the potential of Hungary and Ukraine itself.

It is also important to understand what interests are behind the stated positions of the parties. Sometimes such interests are simple enough, but they are often complex. The fact that the other party aspires, it is better not to guess or speculate, but to know. In the open dialogue on these issues, both Kyiv and Budapest are interested. Expansion of communication, explanation of own motives, timely informing of intentions can strengthen bilateral trust, even in the context of crisis in relations. In addition, understanding the interests of the opponent opens the way for mutual concessions. The discovery of nuances will turn the black-and-white conflict between "good and evil" into a half-tone full picture. This, in turn, will allow you to look at the possibilities of mutual concessions not from the positions of the game with a zero sum, but with the desire to find common solutions.

An additional useful step could be something like an informal agreement on the non-use of anti-Hungarian and anti-Ukrainian rhetoric in the internal narratives of both countries. It is obvious that national issues in both countries have become a means of mobilizing the electorate and will remain for a long time. National slogans, historical myths and ethnic symbols are much easier to apply in a political struggle than unpopular and complex reforms. Nevertheless, it makes sense to make national rhetoric as popular as possible. The

boundary between patriotism and xenophobia or ethnic hostility must be pursued.

Both countries could look for opportunities to implement joint projects in areas of significant interest to them: energy, regional security, ecology, and the fight against transnational threats. If it allows elites to earn more political points than they do with aggressive rhetoric, then there will be a chance to get out of the most likely way to "collision of identities" and implement the "modus vivendi" scenario. The strategic partnership will still be far away, but the crisis phenomena in relations will be much less.

Conflicts between neighbors on the basis of ethnosimvolism - languages, minority rights, interpretation of history - the phenomenon is dangerous and difficult to regulate. In such conflicts, the logic of "zero - sum games" acts and in the end they often become a game with a negative amount, in which all lose.

Both Ukraine and Hungary are losing out of delaying the current crisis. They are losing time, opportunities, image and prospects. Probably, Ukraine loses more, but it is unlikely that it can become a satisfying pleasure in relations between potential partners. Both Kyiv and Budapest have experienced many sad and painful historical lessons that would have suggested that besides the interests of national selfishness, there are also regional security interests as well as an even broader transatlantic context. From overcoming the obstacle to cooperation, you can win much more than you have to pay for them.

# SLOVAKIAN-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS

Slovakia and Ukraine have a dynamic and mostly positive agenda at hand.

Both countries care about regional security. Although Slovakia is a member to NATO and EU, while Ukraine is not, both perceive crisis over Ukraine as a threat. Slovakian government has been consistent in providing Ukraine with diplomatic and political support. Slovakia voted in favor of UN General Assembly Resolution 68/262, dated March, 27, 2014, which stresses territorial integrity of Ukraine and claims invalidity of the so-called "Crimean referendum". Slovakia also advocated signing DCFTA between EU and Ukraine, as well as generally favors Ukraine's pro-Western aspirations.

Within the V4 Group distribution of support to Ukraine following violation of its territorial integrity by Russia in 2014, Slovakia is dealing with security issues and, in particular, energy security. Slovakian experience in enhancing energy security first of all by introducing more energy-effective industries and shifting to renewable energy resources, is of special importance to Ukraine. Slovakia and Ukraine have close positions in what concerns construction of the Nord Steram-2 pipeline. Both see the project as political and both are ready to coordinate efforts against it. Even if it may be too late now, it is important that the two countries have close views on more general problems of European energy security and the role Russia plays in it.

Abovementioned Three Seas Initiative can be a point of discussion the role of Ukraine in the new architecture of security in Central and Eastern Europe. Although Ukraine is not a member of the 3SI, its very establishment in 2016 witnessed a need for additional security institutions. Even without membership in a short-term perspective, Ukraine may offer cooperation.

Most part of Slovakian population does not support occupation of Crimea by Russia and other aggressive

Russian steps in Ukraine. The issue has become a cornerstone during Slovakian presidency in the EU in 2016. Sometimes unwillingly, but Bratislava had to deal with political and security areas, rather than economic, when it came to Ukraine. Improving Ukraine's state capacity and ensuring the conflict in the east of the country does not last too long have become priorities of regional security policy.

As one of the possible instruments for that, cross-border cooperation remains important for both countries. Aimed at overcoming natural and administrative borders between the countries, cross-border cooperation is locally focused. Cooperation between Eastern Slovakia and Transcarpathia is to a large extent built on similar problems: social, economic, infrastructural, etc. Legal framework for cooperation within the Carpathian euroregion was established in 1993. Cross-border cooperation could have been more effective, but movement of people, goods and capital across the border heavily depends on relations between EU and Ukraine. As a result, the customs regime at the Slovakian-Ukrainian border is one of the strictest, which can be attributed to migration issues and fears, absence of services at border crossing points, lack of joint planning, differences in administrative systems, and poor infrastructure. Generally speaking, cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Ukraine is more influenced externally than by local initiatives.

Relations between Slovakia and Ukraine resemble strategic partnership: parties' interests and positions often coincide or complement. They also have huge potential for development of bilateral trade, and the growth of commodity turnover between the two countries amounted to 36% in the first half of the current year. The two countries have similar vision on regional challenges and close perception of threats.

Russian factor still plays an important role in bilateral relations, and it not only sets parties aside, as it often was the case before, but also may provide additional bridges for cooperation. One of them may deal with the energy security, especially within the context of the Nord Stream-2 pipeline. Similar positions towards this project may bring parties closer to joint vision of how energy security in the region may be enhanced. Regional security initiatives, e.g. the Three Seas Initiative, also provide additional potential for further political cooperation, while bilateral mechanisms for protecting rights of minorities may serve as a model for dealing with the issue.

# CONCLUSION

Ukraine's relations with neighbors to the West are far from perfect. The country finds itself in a complicated situation. On the one hand, it needs support from Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia on its way to NATO and EU membership and in containing Russia's aggression. On the other hand, construction of national identity inevitably triggers conflicts with neighbors over history, minority rights, and language issues.

There are two primary problems here. First, deterioration of Ukraine's relations with neighbors is a lose-lose game. Every country involved will end up worse, although Ukraine – as the weakest among all – is likely to lose most. Secondly, strategic logic of such confrontation is quite difficult to overcome. At every turn political elites will feel tempted to raise bets and continue mutual accusations and demands. Left as it is, a new wave of nationalism in the region Europe would significantly damage regional security, weaken multilateral institutions of cooperation, erode trust, and generate economic losses.

Political costs may be high, but neighboring countries of the region could take steps to reduce risks of prolonged confrontation. A deeper understanding of mutual interests may open space for compromise and logrolling. Deteriorating regional security is a challenge for all; and cooperation with the view to restore fundamental institutions may bring more benefits than quarrels.

To achieve this it would be useful to concentrate on long-terms achievements rather than on short-term gains. Spheres of common priority, i.e. energy security, transportation and transit capabilities, security cooperation, should be given special attention. Hostile rhetoric should be discouraged at all possible levels.

More attention could be paid to shared values. Strengthening democratic institutions, enhancing rule of law, protecting human rights, improving solidarity, as well as promoting tolerance may become common goals, capable of contributing into a positive agenda of relations among neighboring countries.

At turbulent times a strong Central and Eastern Europe would provide gains – in security, economy, potential for social development – not only for regional powers, but for Europe as a whole.