

**EU DEMOCRATIZATION AND
THE RUSSIAN ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM:
THE CASE OF UKRAINE**

By

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I, the undersigned Liliia Slobodian, hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted as a part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

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Abstract

In light of the opposing takes of constructivists and rationalists on the key drivers behind the imposition of EU conditionality, the study introduces the alternative explanatory variable and poses the question of how geostrategic factors alter the nature and effectiveness of EU leverage on countries that seek EU membership. The central objective here is to show that when driven by geostrategic motives, EU integration offer tends to enjoy the *de facto* unconditional character which sways power relationship from asymmetrical interdependence favoring the EU to symmetrical interdependence between Union and the aspiring country. This, in turn, disincentivizes the domestic transformation by impeding the credibility of exclusion threats and membership prospect. By answering the research question, the thesis aims at making a theoretical contribution to the existing literature on EU external democracy promotion. To that end, the study turns to the framework of EU leverage offered by Milada Anna Vachudova and applies the crucial-case method by analyzing EU-Ukraine interplay before and after the year of 2014.

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List of Abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CEEC	Central and Eastern European countries
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EUAM	European Union Advisory Mission
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
EP	European Parliament
SGUA	Support Group for Ukraine
Union	European Union

Introduction

In the age of rising illiberalism across Europe, the question of EU democratizing power becomes more vital than ever. For the first time after joining the EU, Hungary and Poland moved from “democracy” status to the “hybrid regime” and “semi-consolidated democracy” respectively (Freedom House 2020). The developments these countries undergo today challenge the perception of EU membership as the most effective incentive for domestic transformations, albeit Union’s core states fiercely oppose any future enlargement. After vetoing the entry talks with Albania and North Macedonia in October 2019, the French President Macron stated: “I don’t want any further new members until we’ve reformed the European Union itself” (The Economist 2019).

Having earned the image of the country at the crossroads, Ukraine persistently turned to EU membership rhetoric for reasons of national identity building and Russian influence deterrence. Ironically, it was the AA with the EU which triggered unprecedented response from the northern neighbor. In the aftermath of the Revolution of Dignity, three-months mass protests against President Yanukovich who refused to sign the agreement, Russia annexed Crimea and launched hybrid war in eastern Ukraine. The year of 2014 became a game-changer in EU-Ukraine relations as Union articulated the country’s membership prospect and extensively engaged with Ukraine’s capacity building. Despite the generous funding and innovative interventions, the EU leverage in Ukraine has not resulted in major transformations.

From the questionable outcomes in the case of Ukraine, the thesis moves to a broader problem of the effectiveness of the EU’s current democratization efforts. In light of the opposing takes of constructivists and rationalists on the key drivers behind the imposition of EU conditionality, the study introduces the alternative explanatory variable and poses the question of how geostrategic factors alter the nature and effectiveness of EU leverage on countries that seek EU membership.

The central objective here is to show that when driven by geostrategic motives, EU integration offer tends to enjoy the *de facto* unconditional character which sways power relationship from asymmetrical interdependence favoring the EU to symmetrical interdependence between Union and the aspiring country. This, in turn, disincentivizes the domestic transformation by impeding the credibility of exclusion threats and membership prospect. By answering the research question, the thesis, therefore, aims at making a theoretical contribution to the existing literature on EU external democracy promotion.

To that end, the study turns to the framework of EU leverage offered by Milada Anna Vachudova and applies the crucial-case method by analyzing EU-Ukraine interplay before and after the year of 2014. Chapter 1 sets up a theoretical basis for the argument. It reviews the premises of EU external democracy promotion, summarizes constructivist take and provides extensive scrutiny of rationalist approach exemplified by Vachudova's work. Resting on the literature review and accommodated to EU integration, the theory of Samaritan's dilemma three alternative hypotheses will be formulated. The Chapter concludes with presenting the method of crucial-case study and outlining the choice of sources and analysis employed within the empirical part of the thesis.

Chapter 2 introduces the case study by analyzing the EU-Ukraine relations prior to 2014. The chronological overview of key developments the country faced since its independence till the Revolution of Dignity combined with the analysis of the political competition and public opinion sheds light on the heterogeneity in Ukraine's stance towards the EU. The following discourse analysis of Ukraine's foreign policy acts and speeches helps to identify the consistent trend of rhetorical commitment to European integration. The Chapter further turns to the EU policy in relation to Ukraine in order to show the reactive approach pursued prior to geopolitical contingencies of 2014.

Final Chapter 3 scrutinizes the EU-Ukraine relations after 2014 and demonstrates the absence of Union's *de facto* active leverage, despite the exercise of *de jure*. In confirmation of Vachudova's

theoretical framework, the nature and intentionality of EU policy interventions are analyzed. Qualifying the deliberateness of EU conditionality, the Chapter proceeds with studying Ukraine-related activity of EP with the purpose of identifying the leading motives behind Union's shift in position. To assess the impact of EU leverage, a brief overview of public opinion and governance indicators of Ukraine is provided. The Chapter concludes with validating the central hypothesis of this study.

Chapter 1. Theoretical Framework

The rise in democratization studies opened the doors to a multiplicity of interpretations related to the nexus of international influence and domestic transformation. Arguably, the theory of EU integration has demonstrated the deepest exploration of how external conditionalities followed by membership prospect can change the national political trajectory. The literature, however, tends to downplay the role of geostrategic dimension, albeit the presence of the latter might drive EU motivations and affect power relationship crucial for the success of democratization efforts. In this vein, the central question this study aims to explore is how geostrategic factors alter the nature and effectiveness of EU leverage, as by far the most powerful tool of EU democracy promotion.

The Chapter sets up a theoretical framework I use to address the puzzle. In the first section, I review the premises of EU external democracy promotion, starting with existing models of democratization and moving to central to this study, EU leverage. To grasp the nature of leverage, I summarize constructivist take and provide extensive scrutiny of rationalist approach exemplified by Vachudova's framework. In the second section, I formulate three alternative hypotheses which rest on literature review and accommodated to EU integration, the theory of Samaritan's dilemma. I conclude with presenting the method of crucial-case study and outlining the choice of sources and analysis I employ within subsequent empirical Chapters.

1.1. Theory of EU External Democracy Promotion

1.1.1. Models of democratization: linkage, leverage and governance

In the wake of post-Cold War regime changes, the phenomenon of democratization attributable to international actors received significant academic attention (Huntington 1991, Starr 1991, Diamond 1995, Pridham et al. 1997). Some argued that foreign influence exercises decisive role in

domestic transformations (Kelley 2004, Vachudova 2005), some appealed to the marginal effect of international environment (Pinkney 1997) while others emphasized the importance of interaction between external and internal factors (Levitsky, Way 2010). To explain the variation in outcomes West-led democratization produces, Levitsky & Way introduced the theoretical framework of linkage and leverage (2005) where former stands for “the density of ties (economic, political, diplomatic, social, and organizational)” (2005, 22, 2010, 43) and latter for “governments’ vulnerability to external democratizing pressure”(2005, 21, 2010, 40).

Both of models have been applied to analyze EU external democracy promotion (Kubicek 2011, Sasse 2013), albeit leverage evolved as dominant in the face of EU enlargement to the east (Vachudova 2005, Schimmelfennig et al. 2006). After the launch of ENP in 2004, Lavenex & Schimmelfennig outlined the third model of EU democratization, governance, defined as “policy-specific, functional cooperation with third countries” (2011, 886). While all three might interplay empirically, as Table 1 shows, analytically these models differ in target audiences they address, channels and instruments they employ as well as the ultimate outcome (Lavenex, Schimmelfennig 2011). Central to this study, leverage aims to craft democratic institutions via the imposition of conditionality. Effectiveness of EU leverage depends on the kind, size, and credibility of EU incentives, thus “credible prospect of membership holds the highest promise” (Lavenex, Schimmelfennig 2011, 898). The asymmetric interdependence in favor of the EU is vital for leverage to succeed since conditionality fails “if a target government knows that the EU prefers unconditional assistance to no assistance or unconditional enlargement to no enlargement” (Lavenex, Schimmelfennig 2011, 894).

	Linkage	Leverage	Governance
Target	Society	Polity	Sector
Outcome	Democratic culture	Democratic institutions	Democratic governance
Channel	Transnational	Intergovernmental	Transgovernmental
Instruments	Socialization	Conditionality	Socialization

Table 1. Models of EU democracy promotion. Source: Lavenex & Schimmelfennig 2011.

1.1.2. EU move towards leverage through constructivist lens

When and why does the EU opt for leverage? Acknowledging the potential of economic, geopolitical and ideological interests to influence member states' positions (Schimmelfennig 2001), constructivists claim it is the appeal to European identity, liberal values and norms of the EU that brings the greatest explanatory power to this question.

In the early 1990s, EU reluctantly responded to membership aspirations of post-communist states. As Union proceeded with enlargement, later on, no member state opposed, albeit the costs outweighed the benefits for many (Fierke, Wiener 1999, Sedelmeier 2001, Schimmelfennig 2001). Sedelmeier argues that “discursively constructed roles can have a significant effect on actors, their identities, interests and behaviour” (2001, 17). In the case of eastern enlargement, the narrative of “special responsibility” EU held in relation to CEE states determined Union's course of action (Sedelmeier 2001). Appeal to the historic opportunity to overcome divisions on the continent and the obligation to support the transformations of post-communist neighbors, according to the scholar, contributed to the collective identity of EU policymakers (Sedelmeier 2001). It further constrained their ability to veto enlargement leaving opponents with no choice but “to enhance the credibility of the EU's self-proclaimed role towards the CEECs” (Sedelmeier 2001, 31).

Schimmelfennig elaborates constructivist approach introducing the concepts of “rhetorical action” and “rhetorical entrapment” (2001). He argues that in response to opposing majority, CEE states and their Union's advocates, most notably Germany, contended that “ideational foundations of

the European international community” oblige Union to admit aspiring countries (Schimmelfennig 2001, 68). The rhetorical action reflected in appeal to EU-determinant norms of liberal democracy, multilateralism and European unity shamed reluctant member states into honoring their “identity- and value-based commitments” (Schimmelfennig 2001, 77). Therefore, following constructivists, EU moves towards the leverage once it gets rhetorically entrapped by the values and norms it articulates to promote.

1.1.3. Theoretical framework of Vachudova: EU leverage through rationalist lens

“Europe Undivided” by Milada Anna Vachudova (2005) constitutes the most coherent theoretical take on EU leverage as the impetus for domestic change. Through the case study of CEE states, including Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary qualified as liberal democracies and Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria as illiberal, the scholar explains when and how the Union influences the course of transformation in aspiring countries. To determine the pattern of democracy, Vachudova scrutinizes the level of political competition, concluding that weak opposition to communism in combination with unreformed communist party gives rise to the illiberal pattern (2005) on which the following review will focus.

From the outset, Vachudova argues that “country’s geographic distance from Brussels or its geostrategic importance to the West” cannot account for variation in national trajectories (2005, 9). Instead, employing a rationalist approach, she develops the framework of EU passive and active leverage. While former stands for the attractiveness of EU membership *per se*, latter envisages “the deliberate policies of the EU toward candidate states” (2005, 3). The models produce distinctively different results in illiberal countries. Passive leverage induces governments to sign up for future membership rhetorically, i.e. to formulate joining the EU as the country’s foreign policy objective (Vachudova 2005). Active leverage, in contrast, incentivizes them to comply with EU

conditionality, thus converging pro-EU rhetoric and policymaking (Vachudova 2005). The subsections below unpack the nature and mechanisms behind this variance.

1.1.3.1. EU passive leverage

Vachudova argues that magnetism of EU membership stems from political and economic benefits (e.g. protection of EU rules, access to EU market) and is reinforced by the costs of exclusion (2005). EU treatment of non-members makes joining the EU particularly appealing while the additional advantage of conditionality acting as the catalyst for domestic transformations enhances membership attractiveness amongst the public (Vachudova 2005). For these reasons, illiberal rulers commit to EU integration rhetorically. Relying on the use of restricted political competition and economic corruption, they, however, resist EU requirements as the costs of adapting policies to liberal democracy and market economy outweigh the benefits of future membership (Vachudova 2005). In the context of monopolized information flows, missing external oversight and low awareness of EU requirements amongst the people, illiberal rulers maintain *status quo*, vigorously resisting “unwarranted attention to internal affairs” expressed in the form of EU accession criteria (Vachudova 2005, 99).

1.1.3.2. EU active leverage: meritocracy, enforcement, asymmetric interdependence

According to Vachudova, Union’s imposition of deliberate conditionality changes national trajectory by, first, stimulating political competition, and second, inducing governments to reform (2005). The scholar warns the two-step process is by no means inevitable yet maintains that after experiencing watershed elections bringing reform-oriented forces to power, the countries are expected to converge on EU requirements (Vachudova 2005). To that end, characteristics of the pre-accession process, including meritocracy, enforcement and asymmetric interdependence bear crucial importance (Vachudova 2005).

In the framework of enlargement, meritocracy stands for correspondence of applicant’s place in membership queue to its progress with EU requirements: adoption of *acquis communautaire*,

implementation of Copenhagen political and economic criteria (Vachudova 2005). Subjecting candidates to same conditionalities gives credibility to EU membership promise and incentivizes compliance (Vachudova 2005). Enforcement reassures merit-based approach as Union examines and evaluates states' performance in light of the pre-accession criteria. Importantly, the toolbox of enforcement (e.g. regular reports, national programs for adoption of the *acquis*) equips EU with public criticism of non-compliance and contributes to internal pressure over the governments (Vachudova 2005). What drives the impact of active leverage the most, however, is the relationship of asymmetric interdependence favoring the EU. Following Vachudova, the imbalance of bargaining power derives from Union's little dependence on "economic or political ties with any particular candidate" as well as initial refraining from conditionality-based engagement (2005, 109). The asymmetry empowers Union with credible threats of exclusion it can invoke in relation to the state failing to meet EU requirements (Vachudova 2005).

Notably, "Europe Undivided" dedicates relatively little attention to Union's motivations behind the shift toward active leverage, albeit their understanding is crucial for establishing asymmetrical interdependence. In agreement with cost-benefit take, Vachudova refers to "straightforward national interest" (2005, 239) further stating that "from the perspective of their economic and geopolitical interests, EU governments preferred an enlarging EU" (2005, 223). The scholar rejects the argument of Schimmelfennig on rhetorical entrapment and maintains that change in position happened due to "anticipated costs of economic instability, conflict, and uncertainty on the EU's eastern borders" (Vachudova 2005, 246).

1.2. Research Question and Hypotheses

Deriving from the downplay of geostrategic factors within reviewed literature on EU external democracy promotion, this thesis poses the following research question: How do geostrategic factors alter the nature and effectiveness of EU leverage on countries that seek EU membership?

In this vein, the study formulates three alternative hypotheses. The null and first hypotheses rest on constructivist and rationalist takes respectively and are enlisted below.

Hypothesis 0: For the nature and effectiveness of EU leverage, geostrategic factors are less important than rhetorical entrapment by EU values and norms.

Hypothesis 1: Irrespective of geostrategic factors, EU active leverage induces aspiring state to reform in the light of asymmetrical interdependence favoring the EU.

The third hypothesis presumes the greater role of geostrategic motivations and turns to Samaritan's dilemma. Developed in the context of welfare reforms by Buchanan (1975), the theory of Samaritan's dilemma has been further applied to analyze international development aid (Selbervik 1999, Ostrom et al. 2001). It assumes perfect informational environment and invokes the motivational problem. The Samaritan represents an actor (e.g. donor) who is concerned with the well-being of others (e.g. recipient country). As Table 2 illustrates, the logic of the argument might be explained through the matrix of payoffs confronted by two players. In application to EU leverage, "donor" stands as the EU while "recipient" as the aspiring country; "aid, sanctions" envisages EU integration offer based on conditionality while "aid" - unconditional EU integration offer. The matrix shows that, given the payoffs, EU dominant strategy is Row 2: provide unconditional integration offer. It is hypothesized here that geostrategic considerations leave EU no option but to actively engage with the aspiring country. By enforcing the conditionality-based offer, the actor becomes redundant. Thus, for EU, the preferred cell is C ("aid - reform") as in this case the Union accomplishes its geostrategic motives: the domestic transformation is induced thanks to the EU. For the country, however, the preferred cell is D ("aid - no reform") since with the lowest effort put, it enjoys the benefits of integration offer. Knowing that EU dominant strategy is to provide unconditional integration offer, the country chooses not to reform as its best response. As a consequence, the equilibrium of interaction moves to the outcome "aid – no reform" which impedes the effectiveness of EU engagement with the aspiring country.

		Recipient	
		Reform 1	No Reform 2
Donor	Aid Sanctions 1	A (2,2)	B (1,1)
	Aid 2	C (4,3)	D (3,4)

Table 2. Samaritan's Dilemma. Source: Selbervik 1999.

To an extent, the accommodation of Samaritan's dilemma to EU leverage portrays earlier mentioned findings of Lavenex and Schimmelfennig on the asymmetrical interdependence. They argue that EU conditionality loses its credibility “if a target government knows that the EU prefers unconditional assistance to no assistance or unconditional enlargement to no enlargement” (Lavenex, Schimmelfennig 2011, 894). The novelty, however, lies in the exploration of EU motivations behind unconditional leverage via the introduction of geopolitical factors as the explanatory variable. The second and the last hypothesis of this study is therefore formulated as follows.

Hypothesis 2: Geostrategic factors might create symmetrical interdependence, thus altering the nature and effectiveness of EU active leverage.

1.3. Research Design and Methodology

To explore the research question of interest, the thesis focuses on the theoretical framework of EU leverage offered by Vachudova and employs a most-likely case study of Ukraine. The crucial-case method, considered as “the most methodologically defensible approach to single-case analysis” (Gerring 2007, 232), aims at providing a theoretical update of existing take on the nature and effectiveness of EU leverage. The case study is conducted by means of document analysis, discourse analysis and the extensive survey of the literature.

1.3.1. Crucial-case method

The crucial-case method envisages analysis of a certain theoretical take by studying the case whose “facts closely fit a theory” (Eckstein 1978, 118). The case can either confirm or disconfirm a theory. To that end, a take needs to be falsifiable, in particular, to have “a law-like structure” and enjoy “deterministic logic” (Gerring 2007, 232, 247). The more precise, consistent and well-elaborated the theory is, the more does it reflect causal law “amenable to crucial-case analysis” (Gerring 2007, 235). By applying “a most-likely case” defined by Gerring as “one that, on all dimensions except the dimension of theoretical interest, is predicted to achieve a certain outcome and yet does not” (2007, 231), one disconfirms the theory. This does not imply rejecting the take under examination, but rather requires a researcher to provide “important updating of a theoretical prior” (Gerring 2007, 238).

An extensive review of Vachudova’s take on EU leverage offered in sub-section 1.3 illustrates, on the one hand, a great deal of details scholar analyses to formulate her theory and on another, striking coherence with which Vachudova explains the political change of six CEE countries. The theory reflects a law-like structure and with accepting degree of probability,¹ offers a deterministic reading of nature and impact EU passive and active leverage enjoy. The framework this study focuses on is, therefore, falsifiable and amenable to crucial-case analysis.

Back in 2005, Vachudova excluded Ukraine from her case study selection, stating that “by the EU’s own choice” the Union does not exercise active leverage over Ukraine (2005, 9). This study argues that in the wake of Revolution of Dignity 2014, Russia’s annexation of Crimea and launch of hybrid war in eastern Ukraine, EU shifted from simply enjoying passive leverage to projecting the exercise of active. Importantly, the thesis does not aim to establish causality between one of the events and EU course of action in relation to the country. Rather, it strives to illustrate the

¹ For example, when characterizing the impact of active leverage on illiberal states via the mechanisms of watershed elections and reforming the state and economy, Vachudova mentions: “by no means is this two-step process of convergence inevitable” (2005, 107).

complexity of leverage dynamics in the country undergoing security crisis and show how geopolitical contingency, which allegedly “contributed to making the EU a different kind of foreign policy actor” (Youngs 2017), might alter the nature and effectiveness of EU leverage.

What makes Ukraine the “most-likely case” according to Gerring? Firstly, the EU’s engagement with Ukraine is by far the strongest amongst the third countries. This refers to macro-financial assistance, grants allocation, nature of AA and other innovative tools aimed at the country’s capacity building Union had employed only in relation to Ukraine. As shown in Chapter 3, EU Ukraine’s policy enjoys conditionality-based nature, *de jure* meritocracy and enforcement, and has been enhanced by the membership prospect, thus qualifying as active leverage according to Vachudova’s framework. Secondly, unlike the theory determines, Ukraine did not experience the convergence on EU requirements, in particular with respect to structural state and economy reformation. In the sphere of corruption, for instance, the state is scoring worse than Georgia and Moldova (Transparency International 2020), two other aspiring countries of Eastern Partnership who, albeit having signed conditionality-based AAs with the EU, have not experienced the level of EU engagement present in Ukraine. Finally, this thesis argues that asymmetrical interdependence as the dimension of theoretical interest is missing in Ukraine. In this regard, the case represents the best fit for qualifying as crucial since Ukraine constitutes the only aspiring country with on-going military conflict, thus holding the greatest probability to affect nature and effectiveness of EU leverage.

With respect to the timeframe, the thesis focuses on the study of EU - Ukraine relations within the 2014-2019 period. The choice is justified, on the one hand, in light of events which unfolded in February 2014 and persisted over time, arguably contributing to geopolitical factors the thesis strives to explore. On the other hand, the 5-years frame allows claiming the validity of *ex-post* assessment of the impact the EU leverage has produced in the aspiring country. In this vein, Vachudova studies the change in economy and democracy indicators of Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria four years after the watershed elections.

1.3.2. Sources and types of analysis

To present and analyze the case study, this thesis turns to primary documents as well as the secondary sources. Via archive research and document analysis, the thesis unpacks the development of EU-Ukraine relations. In this regard, the study consults laws, presidential decrees, parliamentary resolutions, policy strategies on the side of Ukraine; parliamentary resolutions, decisions, committee reports, policy strategies on the side of EU; the text of bilateral treaty - AA. Discourse analysis is employed to explore the foreign policy rhetoric of Ukraine and identify the intentionality of the EU position after 2014. For these purposes, the study turns to State of Union addresses of Ukraine's presidents, who enjoy the greatest competence in formulating country's foreign policy, and records of debates within EP as the only directly elected and thus the most representative Union's body.

To address the selection bias of documents, the thesis surveys existing literature and extensively consults works which rely on interviews with officials, experts and civil society involved in the EU-Ukraine relations (e.g. Dargneva, Wolczuk 2015). The researcher's knowledge of the native language of the case study further prevents the misinterpretation of primary sources in Ukrainian and allows to check for the validity of academia's take on the case study.

Chapter 2. EU-Ukraine Relations Prior To 2014:

Introduction to the Case Study

The scrutiny of EU-Ukraine relations prior to 2014 illustrates, on the one hand, Union's reluctance to engage with the country's transformation and, on the other, Ukraine's consistent rhetorical commitment to EU integration. Essentially, the relationship qualifies Vachudova's take on passive leverage enjoyed over the illiberal democracy and disqualifies the constructivist argument on driving force of rhetorical action. To what extent, however, the above is driven by actors' geostrategic motives? Answering to this question sets the scene for Chapter 3 and assists in understanding the EU-Ukraine interplay after Union's shift towards the active leverage.

This Chapter unfolds in the following order. I first turn to Ukraine and provide the chronological overview of key developments the country faced since the independence of 1991 till Euromaidan of 2014. The analysis of the political competition and public opinion sheds light on heterogeneity in relation to the EU. I proceed with studying the foreign policy discourse and identify the consistent trend of rhetorical commitment to European integration the state expressed on both presidential and parliamentary levels. I finally refer to the EU policy towards Ukraine in the period of 1991-2014 showing Union's reactive approach to the rhetorical demands for deeper integration.

2.1. Political and Societal Heterogeneity in Ukraine's Stance on the EU

Ukraine's watershed elections happened only in 2014 when the Communist Party lost for the first time following 1991 independence and did not make it to the Parliament. Since the early years of statehood, the quality of political competition in the country was impeded as ex-communist rulers headed by Leonid Kravchuk had effectively seized the nation-building agenda of the opposition

(Holovaty 1993). The lack of state and economy reforms within 1991-1994 transformed “the most economically promising” former Soviet Union republic (Deutsche Bank 1991) into the most backward and corrupt state in Europe (Karatnycky 1995). Economic hardships created a rising “nostalgia for the Soviet era” and its affiliated stability (Karatnycky 1995). This sentiment was especially present in more industrialized and - in the view of historical legacies – more Russian-speaking east and south of the country (Karatnycky 1995, Diuk 1998, Birch 2000). In addition to regional divides, public opinion in Ukraine reflected generational cleavages as young people were considerably more prone to support free-market reforms (Karatnycky 1995). In these circumstances, the leadership of the Communist Party advocating for Soviet Union restoration persisted over the 1990ies (Diuk 1998). Though second by the number of parliamentary seats democratic force Rukh called for closer cooperation with Europe and the West, the first decade of independence marked little development of foreign policy discussion *per se* (Diuk 1998).

It was Leonid Kuchma (1994-2004) who “institutionalized the European choice” (Dragneva, Wolczuk 2015) transforming it into the state’s foreign policy objective. In parallel, Kuchma’s presidency rooted crony capitalism in the economy through opaque and non-competitive privatization which gave rise to Ukrainian oligarchy (Miklos, Kukhta, Skurla 2019). Subverting not only economic but also political competition by means of party financing and media ownership (Miklos 2019), oligarchs established crucial stakeholdership in Ukraine’s policymaking. Given their concentration in commodity-intensive industries dependent on cheap energy supply, for years Ukrainian oligarchs advocated tight cooperation with Russia (D’Anieri 2012, Dimitrova & Dragneva 2013). They opposed political criteria of European integration, including the adoption and implementation of democratic rules, seen as the danger to their power (Besters-Dilger 2009). Economic benefits, however, prompted Ukrainian oligarchs to gradually form the pro-EU market stance (Puglisi 2008). As the key actors in country’s decision-making (Miklos 2019), oligarchs supported the multi-vector foreign policy of Ukraine (Shyrokykh 2018) and free trade agreement

with the EU devoid of membership prospect and corresponding conditionalities (Besters-Dilger 2009).

In 2004, mass demonstrations unfolded in Kyiv to protest the election fraud in the presidential runoff of competing candidates Yanukovych and Yushchenko (Kuzio 2005). Endorsed by Russian President Putin (Hesli 2006), Viktor Yanukovych represented the oligarchic elite of Donetsk, Ukraine's most eastern mining region, and joined the support of incumbent Kuchma (Kuzio 2005, McFaul 2005). In contrast, Viktor Yushchenko who had served as the Head of National Bank enjoyed the image of anti-oligarchic reform-maker willing to build democratic "European" Ukraine (Kuzio 2005). Orange Revolution in the result of which Yushchenko became President triggered deeper EU-Ukraine relations. In the absence of independent media and viable institutions, it showed that citizens of Ukraine are "politically sophisticated" (Diuk, Gongadze 2002) and evidenced country's democratic credentials (Youngs 2008, Dragneva, Wolczuk 2015). The Revolution further crystalized the domestic groups ready to advocate for the change of dysfunctional corrupt system (Miklos 2019). Rising civil society together with a new generation of journalists and non-oligarchic business associations empowered the disillusioned voters and fostered the success of the Orange Revolution (Kuzio 2005, Miklos 2019). In the midst of the second decade of independence, however, Ukraine's social cleavages remained in place. While west of the country granted Yushchenko overwhelming support of 92.7%, only 4.9% of eastern residents voted for the future president (Hesli 2006). In addition to the status of the Russian language, the question of EU membership campaigned by Yushchenko's team had served as the apple of discord deepening the pre-existing regional divides (Hesli 2006).

Due to the fragmentation and subsequent conflict within the post-revolutionary forces, *inter alia*, Yushchenko's presidency failed to produce any major transformations (Miklos 2019). In 2010, disillusioned Ukrainians elected Viktor Yanukovych who in the very first months of his term re-interpreted constitutional provisions to expand presidential powers and signed an agreement with

Russia to extend the presence of its military base in Crimea (Herron 2010). Notwithstanding the increased Russian involvement in Ukraine's policymaking (Barry 2010, Herron 2010), economic attractiveness of EU market drove Yanukovych to continue and conclude the AA negotiations (Aslund 2013). His refusal to sign the accord one week prior to Vilnius Summit in November 2013 had led to the Revolution of Dignity, also known as Euromaidan, in the consequence of which Yanukovych was ousted.

2.2. Rhetorical Commitment to European Integration

The analysis of presidential and parliamentary acts, including State of Union addresses, policy strategies, resolutions and laws, demonstrates that EU membership objective developed as the core of Ukraine's foreign policy discourse in the period of 1991-2014. The consistent and ambitious rhetorical commitment to the European integration stood in contrast to the reluctance of deeper involvement in Russia-led multilateral projects, most notably Commonwealth of Independent States (Dragneva, Wolczuk 2015, Shyrokykh 2018).

In 1993, Verkhovna Rada adopted the resolution "On key directions of Ukraine's foreign policy" which emphasized the country's return to European civilization and framed EU membership as "promising goal" (VRU 1993). The document defined the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement to be the first step towards acquiring associate, and in the future full-fledged, EU membership (VRU 1993). Opposingly, the resolution called for the avoidance of Ukraine's participation in CIS institutions, fearing its transformation in "supranational structure of federate or confederate nature" (VRU 1993). The number of policy strategies issued by President Kuchma within 1998-2002 transformed accession to the EU into the "key geopolitical task" (President of Ukraine 2002). Strategy on Ukraine's integration with the EU proclaimed the status of the associate member as the leading medium-term objective of the state's foreign policy (President of Ukraine 1998). In 2002, Kuchma issued the Strategy on economic and social development named "European choice". It portrayed European integration as the "natural consequence of Ukraine's

independence” driven by country’s history, mentality, democratic traditions and “the desire of today’s generation” (President of Ukraine 2002). Referring to the experience of Central East European neighbors, the strategy highlighted the potential of European choice to become the “catalyst for socio-economic and political transformations” in Ukraine (President of Ukraine 2002). Victor Yushchenko reinforced this rhetoric by the frequent mention of European standards, values and norms when presenting his vision of the state and economy reforms to the Parliament (President of Ukraine 2006). He followed the postulate of European integration being “dictated by the very fact of Ukraine’s independence” (President of Ukraine 2006) and defined progress in EU direction as “the key indicator and the result of real changes in the country” (Yushchenko 2008). Ukraine’s fourth President Viktor Yanukovich backslid rhetoric of self-imposed EU conditionalities and put the ambition of European integration on a par with the development of a strategic partnership with Russia (Yanukovich 2011). He nevertheless enshrined European integration with the goal of acquiring membership in 2010 Law “On principles of Ukraine’s domestic and foreign policy” (VRU 2010).

The rhetorical commitment to European integration primarily followed the motive of national identity building as the EU aspirations represented a chance for Ukraine to re-frame its image of the country under the Russian orbit to the one positioned between the east and west (Dragneva, Wolczuk 2015). The narrative of “European choice” bridged to the fact of Ukraine’s independence served as an instrument to maintain the country’s actual sovereignty by formulating the foreign policy of its own. Designed to prove Ukraine’s “inherent Europeanness” (Dragneva, Wolczuk 2015), the rhetoric of shared history and common democratic traditions was further employed to overcome the security concerns. Ukrainian elites feared to play the role of “a small obedient brother to Russia” (Bukkvoll 2002, Holovaty 1993) and perceived European integration as the only deterrent viable of restraining Russian influence (Wolczuk 2003). Tellingly, even Viktor Yanukovich, seen as the most pro-Russian President of Ukraine, in his foreign policy rhetoric upheld the course of EU integration (Dragneva, Wolczuk 2015, Shyrokyh 2018). The demand for

modernization together with reform experience of neighboring countries who joined the EU in the 2000s further determined Ukraine's ambitious pro-EU discourse. The lack of structural reforms in economy drove the country's motive for European integration on the level of business and political elites who believed the convergence with the EU market will increase country's competitiveness (Aslund 2009, Kukhta 2019). On the level of citizens and civil society groups, progress in European integration acted as a beacon of hope for the state's overdue democratization and delivery of reforms (Grabbe 1999, Dragneva, Wolczuk 2015). Thus, the motives of national identity, security and modernization contributed to the ambitious and consistent rhetorical commitment of Ukraine to the European integration.

2.3. EU Policy Towards Ukraine

Since the early years of Ukraine's independence, the EU showed reluctance to engage with the state's process of transformation through the exercise of its active leverage (Kubicek 2005). Many argued the lack of interest follows from Ukraine's image of a country under the Russian orbit (Kissinger 2001) and the subsequent broader question of power balance between EU and Russia (Larrabee 2006, Youngs 2009, Molchanov 2004). Motives aside, in the wake of country's democratization, mostly credited to its people, the EU did react to Ukraine's demands for integration with the AA as the tipping point for EU-Ukraine relations.

In 1994, Ukraine became the first post-Soviet country to sign the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU. In contrast to the association accords concluded with Poland and Hungary, the PCA was of static and at large advisory nature (Petrov 2002, Molchanov 2004). It "explicitly disassociated cooperation from the prospect of EU membership" thus failing to drive relations' future development (Dragneva, Wolczuk 2015). Cooperation aimed at stability and security in Europe – enshrined as the leading objective in relation to Ukraine (European Council 1999) – indicated little willingness of the EU to prompt transformations in the country. Responding to the divergence between Ukraine's rhetorical commitment to European integration

and domestic policymaking in the early 2000s, EU agenda in Ukraine expanded to political criteria the state fell short of (Molchanov 2004, Youngs 2009). In this light, democratic credentials evidenced by Ukrainians during the Orange Revolution morally obliged Union to respond with further interventions (Youngs 2008). Having acknowledged the new prospects for EU-Ukraine relations during Kyiv Summit 2005, EU leaders conformed to Ukraine's demand for new agreement negotiations (Ukrainian Week 2013).

In parallel, the EU launched ENP ambitiously designed to promote domestic reforms in countries on the Union's eastern and southern border. The multilateral framework complemented EU-Ukraine relations with a layer of political instruments, amongst which the ENP Action Plans stood as the most powerful (Dragneva, Wolczuk 2015). Post-revolutionary Government of Ukraine intended to use the latter in order to attain the set of clear conditionalities which would bring the state closer to the candidate status (Euroactive 2004, Dragneva, Wolczuk 2015). Given member states' disagreement, the EU refrained from any membership promises opting for envisaging the launch of new agreement negotiations upon Ukraine's fulfilment of political criteria of the 2005 Action Plan (Wolczuk, 2008). Interestingly, the parties contended over the very name of such accord since Ukraine insisted on the "Association Agreement" while the Union suggested the "enhanced" one (Dragneva, Wolczuk 2015). In 2009, the EU conceded to Ukraine signing the Association Agenda with the list of priorities for action the country undertook in order to prepare and facilitate the implementation of AA (EU-Ukraine Cooperation Council 2009). Progressive and comprehensive in design, the drafted accord allowed for extensive economic integration into the EU market and deeper political cooperation (Petrov, Elsuwege 2016). Avoiding the question of *finalité*, it neither precluded nor explicitly promoted an EU membership prospect for Ukraine (Wolczuk 2008, Wiegand & Schulz, 2015). Importantly, the agreement envisaged comprehensive reform agenda enforced by conditionalities and monitoring mechanisms which will be further described in Chapter 3.

In 2009, the EU commenced Eastern Partnership, another multilateral framework aimed at accelerating integration of interested partner countries in the east (EU Council, 2009). The initiative gained little attention in Ukraine whose negotiations of the AA have already unfolded (Dragneva, Wolczuk 2015). However, it invoked significant concerns on the side of Russia who only after the launch of Eastern Partnership, started fearing the implications of Ukraine's integration with the EU (Tumanov *et al.* 2011; Dragneva, Wolczuk 2015). Eventually, Russian influence of immense scale on Ukraine's ex-President (Wilson 2014) led to the U-turn as Yanukovich suddenly refused to sign the AA in November 2013.

2.4. Key Findings

The analysis of EU-Ukraine relations before 2014 to the greatest degree indicates the exercise of EU passive leverage over the state of illiberal pattern. The absence of deliberate policies towards Ukraine resulted in the country's blatant divergence between EU-committed foreign policy rhetoric and reforms-free domestic policymaking. Though the AA negotiations might suggest EU shift towards the active leverage, real implications of the agreement should be observed after its full enactment and hence will be addressed in Chapter 3.

After Soviet Union dissolution, Ukraine did not experience watershed elections since unreformed communist elites re-gained power. The class of oligarchs who evolved after opaque privatization further impeded the quality of political competition. This transformed Ukraine into a democracy of illiberal pattern with unprecedentedly corrupt governance. Economic hardships deepened pre-existing social cleavages reflected in regional disagreements over the direction Ukraine should take externally. Yet, the deteriorating situation also gave rise to domestic groups ready to advocate for the change associated with the EU. Strong civil society, active journalists and the new generation of Ukrainians drove the success of Ukraine's 2004 and 2014 revolutions. Non-oligarchic business and emerging medium class enhanced the pro-EU coalition. Capitalizing on public perception of

EU integration as the catalyst for overdue reforms, political leaders of Ukraine adopted EU-centered foreign policy rhetoric.

Distinctively, it was Ukraine who demanded the EU's further engagement as the Union reluctantly crafted policy interventions in relation to the country. This separates the case study from the theoretical framework of Vachudova who argues that in the absence of active leverage, illiberal governments resist the imposition of conditionalities "complaining of unwarranted attention to internal affairs" (Vachudova 2005). Given their dependence on rent-seeking behavior, domestic costs of compliance with EU requirements outweigh the benefits of integrating with the EU (Vachudova 2005). Ukraine's invitation for external pressure falls outside of this premise, albeit the country leads world rating in crony capitalism (The Economist 2016). The departure from illiberal pattern might be explained by the geostrategic concerns. Political elites of newly independent Ukraine employed rhetorical commitment to European integration and maintained its striking consistency over time with the aim to deter the influence of neighboring Russia. The quest for EU attention pursued the objectives of re-calibrating the image of "a small obedient brother to Russia" (Bukkvoll 2002), building national identity and managing Russia-connected security risks. Ironically, the geostrategic concerns about the same actor constrained EU position with regard to Ukraine. Contrary to the null hypothesis of this study, the rhetorical action failed to entrap Union by inducing it to exercise active leverage over the country. Leaving the door neither open nor closed, the EU started introducing the compromise policy solutions, i.e. the AA.

Chapter 3. EU-Ukraine Relations After 2014:

Move Towards *De Jure* Active Leverage,

Absence of *De Facto*

The events of 2014, including Revolution of Dignity, Russia's annexation of Crimea and launch of hybrid war in eastern Ukraine, triggered EU's pro-active engagement with the country's domestic policymaking. Notwithstanding the conditionality-based policy, EU tolerated slow pace of Ukraine's anti-corruption efforts, refraining from rigorous enforcement of its own requirements. As leaving the doors neither open nor closed transformed into the cautious articulation of Ukraine's membership prospect, the Chapter explores how geostrategic factors alter the nature and effectiveness of leverage, arguing that in the case of Ukraine, EU *de facto* active leverage is missing.

This Chapter is divided as follows. The first section analyzes EU policy interventions with respect to their nature and intentionality. In confirmation of Vachudova's theoretical framework, I strive to check whether the imposition of EU conditionality was deliberate, i.e. meant to exercise leverage over the country's transformation. The second section aims at exploring the leading motives behind EU position and therefore turns to Ukraine-related activity of EP as Union's key representative body. To assess the impact of EU leverage crucial for its qualification as active, in the third section, I provide a brief overview of public opinion and governance indicators of Ukraine.

3.1. EU Policy Towards Ukraine After 2014

This section scrutinizes EU policy interventions introduced in relation to Ukraine after the Euromaidan revolution. To analyze their nature, I provide an overview of instruments

encompassing policy areas varying from security to anti-corruption. On the example of AA, I show the conditionality-based nature of EU policy and identify principles of enforceability and meritocracy envisaged in agreement's design. To identify the intentionality of interventions, I study the Ukraine-related activities and debates in the EP as Union's key representative body. The analysis allows me to indicate the deliberateness of EU conditionalities.

3.1.1. Multifaceted toolbox of support

Following the events of 2014 Revolution of Dignity, Russia's annexation of Crimea and launch of hybrid war in the eastern Ukraine, the EU took a pro-active stance in relation to Ukraine, introducing the range of policy measures. The scale of assistance to Ukraine has considerably increased while the nature of the instruments employed became more innovative and sophisticated.

The EU support to Ukraine in grants scored the highest amongst the third countries and almost reached the level of amounts offered to CEE states within their pre-accession process, making EU the biggest donor in the country (Wolczuk, Žeruolis 2018). As shown in Annex I, by 2020, Ukraine was expected to receive €4.83 billions of technical assistance with only Poland (€6.122 B.) and Romania (€5.264 B.) running ahead. In addition to the pre-existing mechanism of grants allocation, Union launched a multifaceted toolbox of interventions encompassing almost every area of domestic policymaking. Table 3 illustrates that starting from 2014, the EU expanded its presence in Ukraine by, *inter alia*, establishing the EU Advisory Mission to assist the reform of civilian security sector, endeavoring delegated agreements to coordinate changes in sectors varying from law enforcement to anti-corruption, and providing humanitarian aid to ease the deterioration of living conditions in areas of conflict-affected eastern Ukraine.

To boost transformations, the EU crafted innovative instruments of Support Group for Ukraine, macro-financial assistance and budgeting employment of civil servants (Wolczuk, Žeruolis 2018). These measures aim at building up the institutional capacity of Ukraine vital for successful

implementation of the AA (Wolczuk, Žeruolis 2018). Initiated by the president of the European Commission, the group of EU officials is tasked to facilitate the reform process in Ukraine through expertise and resources management (EC 2016). SGUA puts a special focus on state-building issues (Wolczuk, Žeruolis 2018), albeit intervenes only upon the corresponding decision of Ukrainian authorities (EC 2016). The macro-financial assistance of value €3.8 billion is designed to foster Ukraine's economic stabilization and accelerate the adoption of reforms (EC 2020). It functions on the basis of EU-Ukraine memorandum of understanding envisaging the list of policy changes the government is conditioned to make in order to receive finances (EU-Ukraine 2015). Finally, in the framework of public administration reform, the EC launched the budgeting program helping Ukraine to pay higher salaries to civil servants whose capacity is pivotal for reforms' viability in the long run (Secretariat of Ukraine's Government 2017, Wolczuk, Žeruolis 2018).

Date	Type	Area
March 2014 – September 2017	Association Agreement – Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area	Trade, legal approximation, political cooperation
April 2014	Support Group for Ukraine	Political and economic reforms stemming from the Association Agenda
July 2014	The EU Advisory Mission	Civilian security sector
2014	Delegated agreements (e.g. Pravo-Justice)	Policy and reform issues
2014, 2015, 2017, 2018	Macro-financial assistance	Economic stabilization, reforms
May 2017	Regulation on visa liberalization for Ukrainian citizens	Migration, public order, security
May 2017	Budgetary support for hiring staff to public sector institutions	Civil service reform
2014 - ongoing	Investment plan & Humanitarian support in conflict-affected eastern Ukraine	Human rights, social protection
2014 - ongoing	Technical assistance under the European Neighborhood Instrument	Economy, governance, society
2018	EU Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Ukraine	Civil society

Table 3. EU policy interventions in Ukraine after 2014.

Source: author's compilation using information from European Commission, European Council, European External Action Service.

3.1.2. Association Agreement design: conditionality, enforcement and meritocracy

While some EU policy interventions in Ukraine enjoy the nature of conditionality, e.g. macro-financial assistance, the AA stands as the most far-reaching and complex imposition of criteria to meet. The agreement sets up a deep and comprehensive free trade area removing or lowering tariff and non-tariff barriers (Dragneva, Wolczuk 2015). To benefit from above, Ukraine undertakes the commitment of legal approximation which entails transposition of EU *acquis* into the country's regulatory framework (Wolczuk, Žeruolis 2018). "Market access" conditionality aligns legislative systems of EU and Ukraine, thus exercising leverage over national institutions expected to adopt and administer the rules in question (Petrov, Van Elsuwege 2016, Wolczuk, Žeruolis 2018).

Importantly, the AA conditions Ukraine's integration within the EU upon its implementation of the agreement as well as "track record in ensuring respect for common values, and progress in achieving convergence with the EU in political, economic and legal areas" (EU-Ukraine AA, Preamble). Silencing the issue of membership prospect, the accord "leaves open future developments in EU-Ukraine relations" (EU-Ukraine AA, Preamble) and through evolutionary clauses tailors Ukraine's progress to tangible gains, e.g. visa liberalization (Petrov, Van Elsuwege 2016). The principle of meritocracy is institutionally enhanced by the Association Council competent to issue binding decisions in order to, *inter alia*, update the scope of AA (Dragneva, Wolczuk 2015).

At last, agreement enshrines the robust monitoring of Ukraine's compliance (Van der Loo *et al.* 2014). The government is obliged to, in particular, submit regular performance reports to the EU whereas the latter, in addition to progress reports conclusion, is entitled to conduct on-spot missions (EU-Ukraine AA). Hence, comprehensive and enforceable conditionalities of the AA empower EU with significant *de jure* leverage over the reform process in Ukraine.

3.1.3. Deliberateness of conditionality

The analysis of EP's activity in the post-Euromaidan period validates the deliberateness of the reform process imposed as the conditionality on Ukraine in the virtue of AA. Since 2014, the EP passed the number of resolutions on Ukraine, each of which reinforced the image of AA as the milestone in EU-Ukraine relations (2014/2627, 2014/2717, 2014/2841, 2014/2965). Notably, parliamentary acts also stressed the reform-oriented nature of the agreement. Resolution 2014/2965 portrays AA as “the roadmap for swift necessary reforms” while Resolution 2014/2717 defines it as the driving force for “modernization, strengthening the rule of law and stimulating economic growth”. Upon signing the agreement, HR/VP Štefan Füle proclaimed the AA signifies “European Union’s commitment to support Ukraine along the road of transforming this country into a stable and prosperous European democracy” (Füle 2014). To that end, the Parliament urged Council and Commission “to spare no effort” in assisting Ukraine’s reform process “with a view to paving the way for the full implementation of the bilateral EU-Ukraine Association Agreement” (2014/2965). This illustrates that the EU legislative body perceives domestic changes in Ukraine as the conditionality for progressing with the AA. By endorsing SGUA, EUAM, macro-financial assistance, all aimed at institutional capacity building, the EP provides Ukraine with means to implement reforms, thus demonstrating the deliberateness of imposed conditionality. The regular urge for structural transformations and, in particular, fight against corruption underlines intentionality of the EU to produce an impact in the country. Resolution 2014/2965 calls Ukrainian Government to develop program which will “eradicate systematic corruption” while the joint statement of EU Parliament, Council and Commission (accompanying Decision 2018/947 on macro-financial assistance) requires Ukraine to establish “well-functioning anti-corruption court” (Dombrovskis 2018).

3.2. Shifts in EU Position Through the Lens of European Parliament's Activity

Study of discourse parliamentarians and commissioners employed in relation to Ukraine's policy indicates important shifts EU position underwent after events of 2014. From little willingness to engage with country's domestic transformations, Union moved towards articulating Ukraine's membership prospect, opposing the application of geopolitical logic and building up the pro-Ukraine consensus. Markedly, country-related debates repeatedly invoked the need "to redouble its (Union's) commitment to and support for the European choice and territorial integrity of Moldova and Georgia" (RSP 2014/2627) as well as the urge "to speak with one voice vis-à-vis the Ukrainian crisis and the behaviour of the Russian Government" (RSP 2014/2717).

Moving to the shifts, the Union, first of all, overcame its reluctance to articulate membership prospect in relation to Ukraine. Adopted right after Putin's launch of Crimea seizure (Reuters 2014), Resolution 2014/2595 emphasized that "Article 49 TEU refers to all European States, including Ukraine, which may apply to become a Member of the Union". The number of subsequent acts reiterated state's prospect to join the EU, provided it "adheres to the principles of democracy, respects fundamental freedoms and human and minority rights, and ensures the rule of law" (RSP 2014/2627, 2014/2699, 2014/2717, 2014/2841, 2014/2965). Markedly, it was the amendment of Polish EP member, Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, which brought the change in EU rhetoric to life as the parliamentarian appealed "to send a positive signal to Ukraine" (Saryusz-Wolski 2014). The analysis of EP debate further reveals that representatives of CEE countries and Poland especially are more prone to invoke membership prospect within Ukraine-related discussions.

Secondly, the Union started actively opposing the application of geopolitical logic to Ukraine. Seen as "watershed" (RSP 2014/2595), Euromaidan manifested bottom-up legitimacy of Ukraine's demands for integration. Addressing the Parliament shortly after the revolution, President of the Commission Barroso suggested that immediate signing of AA political chapters "has been wished

for by its (Ukraine's) people" (Barroso 2014). To meet aspirations of Ukrainians, the EP called for concrete steps of support, e.g. finalizing visa-free regime (RSP 2014/2699). In response to Russia's aggression, Parliament repeatedly raised the exclusive right of Ukrainians to decide on the foreign policy direction of their country (RSP 2014/2547, Rouček 2014). "The people of Ukraine, its independence and sovereignty should not become victims of geopolitical zero-sum games" (Füle 2014) - appealed Štefan Füle. In this context, the narrative of Ukrainians who "need and deserve" EU support determined the country-related debates in the EP (Boştinaru 2014, Paşcu 2014, Saryusz-Wolski 2014, Ježek 2016, Gahler 2017, 2018).

Despite opposition from parties affiliated with populist and far-right agenda or non-attached members, the consensus around the question of Ukraine constitutes a third shift in Union's position. In the virtue of emerged multi-party support, within 2014-2019 period, the EP managed to pass 19 resolutions on the situation in Ukraine or country-specific issues, adopt regulation introducing a visa-free regime for Ukrainian nationals, and approve decisions on macro-financial assistance. Importantly, the consensus persisted over time and even though regional and political divides about the future of EU-Ukraine relations remained, the clause on membership prospect found the suffice support to be enshrined in the number of parliamentary resolutions.

3.3. Ex-Post Evaluation of EU Leverage in Ukraine

EU's extensive engagement with Ukraine produced rather mixed results. On the one hand, the membership rhetoric of Ukrainian officials reached its peak with enshrining the "inevitability of European and Euro-Atlantic course" (Parliament of Ukraine, Preamble) in the country's constitution. The prospect of EU membership recorded the highest public support as in May 2019, 66% of Ukrainians stated they would like their country to accede to EU (National Democratic Institute 2019). The analysis of annual surveys conducted under the auspices of EU neighbors east in the timeframe of 2016-2019 further indicates a dynamic rise in public perception of EU support effectiveness (from 34% in 2016 to 46% in 2019) and positive image of the EU (from 49% in 2016

to 56% in 2019). Interestingly, 75% of respondents “strongly/somewhat” affiliate EU with the commitment to fight corruption (EU Neighbors East 2018).

On the other hand, the divergence between rhetoric and policymaking persisted (Wolczuk 2017). Despite watershed elections in the aftermath of Revolution of Dignity, despite referred by many as “remarkable” reform progress in comparison to the years of stagnation (Ash, Lough, Wolczuk 2017), Ukraine’s Achilles heel – corruption – faced little changes. The latest report of corruption perception index ranks country 126th which is strikingly below not only the EU average but also results demonstrated by other aspiring countries (Transparency International 2020). Figure 1 illustrates that political corruption as an aggregate of the public sector, executive, legislative and judicial corruption over the period of 2014-2019 remained considerably high while the effectiveness of Ukraine’s government, defined as the quality of service provision, continued to stand on a signally low level. Notably, some progress has been achieved in the area of rule of law, yet its tangibility is questionable in the light of endemic corruption.

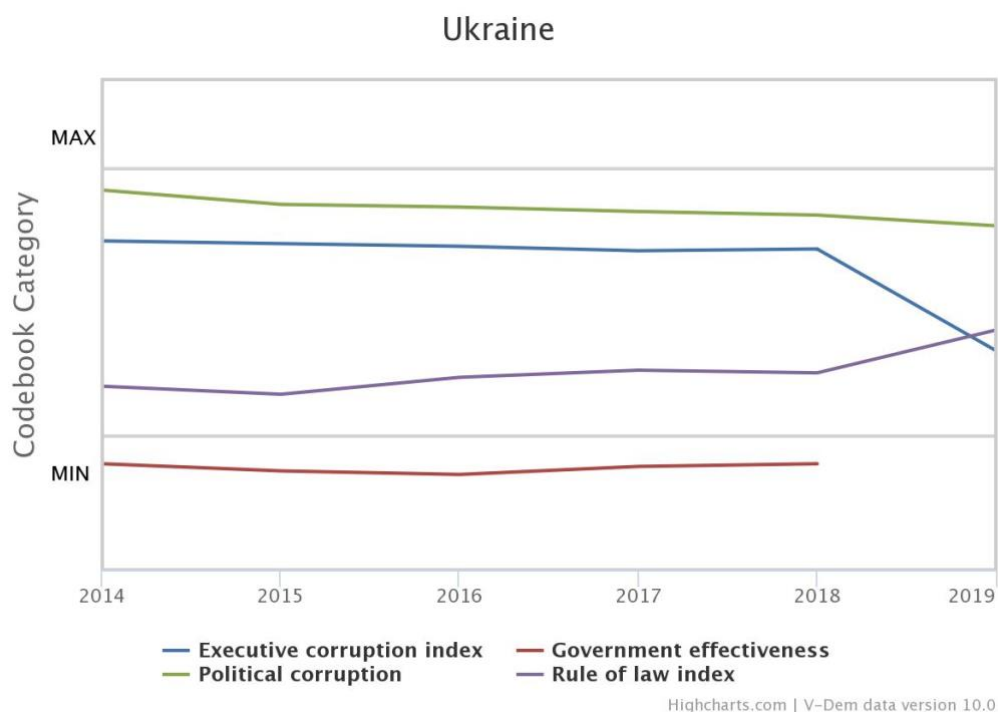


Figure 1. The dynamics of governance indicators. Source: V-Dem.

In these circumstances, EU decision to disburse macro-economic assistance in 2017 and 2018, notwithstanding the failure of Ukraine's Government to meet conditionalities envisaged by the common memorandum of understanding (Wolczuk, Žeruolis 2018), seems at least inconsistent. It devalues the essence of conditionality and sends a misleading signal of EU satisfaction with Ukraine's little reform progress. Impeding EU capacity to enforce its requirements, the *de facto* unconditional assistance further raises questions about the motives Union pursues in relation to the country and the intended outcome its extensive engagement with Ukraine is expected to achieve.

3.4. Key Findings

The analysis of EU post-Euromaidan policy in relation to Ukraine reveals an evident departure from the passive leverage. In contrast to the mode of making concessions to country's demands for European integration, the EU switched to pro-active engagement with Ukraine's transformations by dramatically increasing financial assistance and employing innovative instruments directed at state's capacity building. The far-reaching conditionality combined with concrete enforcement mechanisms and evolutionary clauses of AA empowered EU with significant *de jure* leverage over the reform process in Ukraine. The deliberateness to produce change was articulated on multiple occasions in resolutions and speeches of EU parliamentarians and commissioners.

Notably, the shifts EU position underwent in relation to Ukraine happened in the context of highly geopolitical contingencies. Appealing to European values of freedom and democracy, Revolution of Dignity 2014 rhetorically entrapped Union into assisting the country while Putin's annexation of Crimea and launch of hybrid war in Ukraine put at risk the security of very EU and its eastern members especially. Youngs argues that "Russia-Ukraine crisis has contributed to making the EU a different kind of foreign policy actor" (2017), and the analysis of EP's debates validates this claim

to the extent that events of 2014 did trigger the revision of EU interplay with Russia and countries of Eastern Partnership.

Following Vachudova, the imposition of EU deliberate conditionality in illiberal democracy who underwent watershed elections produces domestic change reflected in state and economy reformation. Though assessment of Ukraine's reform progress falls outside the scope of this study, the governance indicators evidence country's failure to address the most urgent problem of corruption. The disbursement of macro-financial assistance in the context of Ukraine's non-compliance further illustrates the Union's little capacity or willingness to correct the *status quo* by enforcing the conditionalities it designs. This prompts the study to question the presence of asymmetrical interdependence in current EU-Ukraine relations.

Given the geostrategic significance of Ukraine as the biggest eastern neighbor, it is suggested here that events of 2014 transformed the imbalance of bargaining power Union usually holds into the relationship of symmetrical interdependence. Furthermore, the security crisis devalued the principle of meritocracy as one of the membership requirements, "good neighborliness" (Smith 2003, 119), moved out of the country's control. As a consequence, the EU lost the credibility of both exclusion threats and membership promise. To realize its geostrategic motives, the EU had no choice but to actively engage with Ukraine. Opting for *de facto* unconditional integration offer made Ukraine realize that assistance will come disrespectful of its reform progress. Further knowing that, in the virtue of ongoing war, compliance with EU conditionalities will not bring the country closer to the membership, Ukraine chose not to reform. This validates the second hypothesis of the thesis and shows that geostrategic factors might create symmetrical interdependence, thus altering the nature and effectiveness of EU active leverage.

Conclusion

The study of EU leverage dynamics in the case of Ukraine offers important contributions for better understanding of nature and effectiveness the EU's democratization efforts enjoy today. The reluctance to engage with Ukraine's transformation prior to 2014, despite the country's rhetorical commitment to European integration, illustrates the potential of geostrategic factors to override the rhetorical values-based entrapment as envisaged by Schimmelfennig. The shift from passive leverage towards the projection of active in the face of highly geopolitical contingencies, on the one hand, reinforces Vachudova's take on the crucialness of asymmetrical interdependence and on another, updates it with the introduction of essential variable capable of explaining the variance in outcomes EU leverage can produce.

The key findings of this study suggest that imposed in the conditions of post-revolutionary times and security crisis EU conditionality, even if followed by the legally prescribed principles of meritocracy and enforcement, and enhanced by the articulated membership prospect, tends to lose its credibility. The accommodated to EU integration, Samaritan's dilemma nicely explains how geopolitical factors driving the EU rationale behind the leverage sway asymmetrical interdependence to the symmetric relationship. Fearing to become redundant, EU has no other option but to actively engage with the aspiring country by, *inter alia*, offering the unconditional integration. Knowing this, the country chooses not to reform as with the lowest effort put, it enjoys the benefits of integration offer. In this manner, the equilibrium of interplay moves to the unsustainable outcome "aid – no reform" which alters the nature of EU leverage and ultimately impedes its effectiveness.

The implications of this argument go well beyond the case study selected. Arguably, the events of 2014 faced by Ukraine crystalized the role of Russia as the prior elephant in the room of EU's Eastern Partnership policy. While the future course of Union's action remains to be seen, the

geostrategic considerations present in relation to aspiring countries in the east are likely to persist and further determine the nature and effectiveness of EU leverage in these countries.

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Appendix

Table 2: Pre-accession EU assistance to candidate countries from Central and Eastern Europe, 1990–2006, allocations (commitments) € million

Country	Phare* 1990–99	Phare 2000– 03	SAPARD** 2000–03	ISPA*** 2000–03	Total EU grant support 2000–03	Transitional facility 2004–06	Total 1990– 2006	Per capita, €
Bulgaria	878.2	557.8	218.7	428.4	1,204.9	859.5	2,942.6	360
Czech Republic	406	391.3	92.8	293.4	777.5	36.1	1,219.6	119
Estonia	186.4	136.2	50.8	119.5	306.5	17.7	510.6	357
Hungary	954.6	467.4	159.8	368.9	996.0	35.9	1,986.6	195
Latvia	251.6	153.3	92.2	195.3	440.8	19.5	711.9	291
Lithuania	340.5	407.9	125	216.9	749.8	35.7	1,125.5	321
Poland	2,036.6	1,807.5	708.5	1,454.4	3,970.5	114.9	6,122.0	159
Romania	1148	1,099.9	632.1	1,002.4	2,734.4	1,381.5	5,263.9	233
Slovakia	315.4	295.4	77.1	195.7	568.2	29.4	913	170
Slovenia	193	141.8	26.8	64.2	232.8	17.5	443.3	221
Total	6,709.8	5,458.5	2,183.8	4,339.1	11,981.4	2,547.7	21,238.9	203
Ukraine****	831.1				478.1	442.2	1,751.4	35
Ukraine**** (1991–2016)							3,823.7	79

*Initially Poland and Hungary Assistance for the Restructuring of the Economy programme (Phare)

** Special Accession Programme for Agricultural and Rural Development (SAPARD)

*** Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession (ISPA)

**** Grants only

Sources: European Commission, *Phare Programme Annual Reports* 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999; European Commission, *General Reports on Pre-accession Assistance (Phare-ISPA-SAPARD)* 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003; Business and Strategies Europe (2015), 'Evaluation of PHARE [EU pre-accession] financial assistance to Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia'; European Commission (2016), 'Support Group of Ukraine. Activity Report. The First 18 Months'; Population data from US Census Bureau International Database.

Table. Comparison of EU pre-accession assistance to ECC and EU grants' commitments to Ukraine. Source: Wolczuk, Kataryna and Darius Žeruolis. 2018. *Rebuilding Ukraine: an Assessment of EU Assistance*. Chatham House, research paper. P. 34.