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Policy towards the European Union

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EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE
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Abstract

This paper examines the progress of, and conditions for, Europeanisation in one of the EU's new neighbours to the East. Since the late 1990s under Leonid Kuchma's presidency, Ukraine regularly expressed its willingness to participate in European integration via membership of the European Union. Yet these foreign policy declarations have not been accompanied by the necessary acceleration of domestic reforms. The paper argues that Ukraine has sought integration with the EU but without undergoing Europeanisation—extensive change to institutions and policies at the domestic level in line with EU's more or less explicit 'normative targets'. This is despite the fact that this is a model of proven utility as evidenced by its implementation in East-Central European states.

The paper aims to explain why the progress of Ukraine's integration with the EU has been confined to foreign policy declarations by exploring: first, the role of sources of Ukraine's policy towards the EU both at the elite and mass levels; and second, the reasons for Ukraine's inability to enact the 'European choice' in domestic reforms. Finally, the conditions under which a shift from declarations to actual Europeanisation in post-Soviet non-EU countries might occur will be identified by extrapolating from insights drawn from the literature on the EU's eastern enlargement in the context of the EU's new European Neighbourhood Policy.

Keywords

EU-East-Central Europe; Ukraine; Political science; Legitimacy; Identity; Europeanisation; Democratisation.

Introduction: Europeanisation beyond the EU¹

The impact of European integration on the domestic political and social processes of the member states and prospective members has been studied extensively. The concept of Europeanisation, which has been applied widely in these studies, depicts a set of processes through which EU political, social, and economic dynamics become part of domestic discourse, identity formation, political structures, and public policies (Raedelli, 2000). In efforts to capture the wide-ranging impact of EU-level dynamics on domestic developments, the term of Europeanisation has become unwieldy corrupted by many contested definitions. Indeed Europeanisation is as much an area of enquiry as it is a concept (Grabbe, 2003), which, in its broadest meaning, refers to (diverse) changes in core domestic institutions of politics and for governance, undertaken in the processes of adaptation for European integration (Featherstone, 2003). By implication therefore Europeanisation implies a degree of internalisation of European values and policy paradigms at the domestic level (Olsen, 2002).

Interestingly, the concept of Europeanisation has been extended further in that it has been applied to explain the behaviour not only of member states but also to explain the changes in aspirant states. This extension has been justified by the discernable impact of the EU on domestic politics and policy making in the applicant states. Thanks to its role as a powerful integrating force, the Union mobilised them to embark on extensive domestic change prior to joining the Union.²

The extent of EU conditionality has been far greater for the East-Central European (ECE) countries than for earlier entrants as the EU required the ECE prospective member states to introduce reforms to areas at the heart of domestic policy making, such as judicial system, administrative structures, and regional devolution. The ECE candidate states have adapted their processes, policies, and institutions to new practices, norms, rules, and procedures within a European system of governance (Olsen, 2002) even though existing member states have not been required to adapt in some areas, for instance, with regard to the adoption of minority rights protection.³ As a result of the asymmetrical relationship of a candidate state vis-à-vis the EU, the latter was endowed with a disproportionate influence on domestic policy making. So even though the candidate states were not able to influence decision making in the EU, the desire for membership provided a stronger incentive than for (some of) the existing member states to implement EU policies. Indeed, ECE candidate states acted on conditionality, despite the vagueness, inconsistency and uncertainty surrounding the Copenhagen criteria. Conditionality has shaped the domestic reform programmes in many areas, even though it has suffered from many procedural problems, which have been labelled as the moving target problem, double standards, the measurement problem, the consistency and the sufficiency problem ('Report on Political Dimensions of the Accession Criteria', 2002). The exact dynamics of pre-accession Europeanisation in ECE have yet to be explained fully, but it is widely acknowledged in the literature that through the progressive development and deployment of accession conditionality, the EU has effectively used the prospect of membership as its main foreign policy instrument in ECE, and thereby become 'the key external driver

1 The first, shorter version of this paper was prepared for a Stefan Batory Foundation (Warsaw) project *The New European Union and Ukraine* in 2003. I would like to thank all of those whose insightful and stimulating comments have helped me shape this paper, above all, Judy Batt, Grzegorz Gromadzki, Marius Vahl, Brigid Fowler, Oleksandr Sushko, and Sarah Whitmore and two anonymous reviewers.

2 However, more research is needed on the impact of domestic politics on enlargement outcomes, investigating sources of candidate states' diverse behaviour vis-a-vis the EU during the accession process.

3 Undoubtedly, the prospect of EU membership has inspired extensive changes in the candidate states in ECE. But the question remains as to whether Europeanisation as enforced by the EU accession conditionality for the future member states in ECE is actually optimal from the point of view of democratisation, economic restructuring and growth. Also, while being deeper and broader in scope than in the previous cases of accession to the EU, the impact of the EU on the domestic transformation in the candidate states has nevertheless still been patchy and inconsistent (see Grabbe, 2003).

of policy reform' (Grabbe, 1999:1). As a result, the post-communist political and economic transformation process has become equated with preparation for membership (i.e. Europeanisation).

But there is little literature on Europeanisation in non-pro prospective member states in Europe (with the exception of the EFTA countries). This dearth is noted both in terms of how the EU's foreign policy towards non-EU European countries are launched, developed and implemented, and the responses of these states to those policies. Even though the literature on Europeanisation explicitly acknowledges that the EU may exert adaptive pressure on the countries which are not member states, the cases of Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, that is the European countries, which in 2004 became EU's neighbours to the East, have remained unexamined. This has been largely owing to their relative neglect in the EU's external policy and the perceived intractability of their post-Soviet transformations, something which meant that the concept of Europeanisation has had limited, if any, explanatory utility.

The EU's expansion to the former communist bloc, nevertheless, raises the very question of the role that 'Europe' plays in domestic politics in post-communist countries further east. Despite their relative neglect in the literature, it is not as if these countries have been indifferent to 'Europe'. Crucially, their stance towards the EU has differed widely according to the different configuration of domestic and external factors in each of those states.

By considering the case of Ukraine, which is, after Russia, the largest post-communist state in Europe, the emerging debate on the influence that the EU currently exerts and potentially can exert outside its boundaries in Europe takes on particular salience. In 2003, the EU acknowledged the challenge of '[spreading] prosperity and good governance to countries further east', while at the same time withholding the prospect of membership. The paper will explore the conditions under which the EU can promote changes at the domestic level in European, post-Soviet states to the east of its post-enlargement boundaries. So far the impetus behind Europeanisation in post-communist states outside the EU has been the prospect of membership as well as the active involvement of the EU in setting and monitoring compliance with its conditionality. The investigation of the prospect of Europeanisation in general and the impact of the new European Neighbourhood Policy in particular precipitates a comprehensive examination of domestic factors behind these countries' policies towards the EU. The examination of the constellation of factors that work in favour or militate against adopting more or less implicit European standards in EU's non-members states has not only academic merit but also practical relevance; in the post-enlargement stage of European integration, the challenges of the New Neighbourhood countries acquire greater salience both for academics and policy-makers.

1. Ukraine under Kuchma: Seeking Integration without Europeanisation

In the late 1990s the Ukrainian leadership expressed the intention of joining the European Union. It was the first post-Soviet state, which formed part of the Soviet Union since its inception (and thus experienced 70 years of Soviet-style modernisation) to do so. The decision to pursue membership seemed to imply a willingness on the part of Ukrainian elites to satisfy the concrete political and economic preconditions of EU membership, as countries in pursuit of EU membership are effectively required to subject their domestic policy processes to the scrutiny of the EU. Yet despite repeated declarations by Ukrainian political leaders of a 'European choice', Ukraine has failed to transform itself 'into a fully European country, measured by stability and prosperity' as opposed to being 'just a country which is located in Europe' (Tedstrom, 2001:33).

There are question marks over the commitment of the Ukrainian political class to the ideals espoused by the EU—democracy, the rule of law, the respect for human rights. Despite the country's fast economic growth since 2000, the incomplete record of economic reforms still casts doubt on Kyiv's commitment to a functioning market economy: economic liberalisation still remains to be completed; barriers to market entry and exit are still prominent; and property rights, laws and contractual obligations remain far from transparent and enforceable in courts. As Sherr pointed out 'Ukraine's political leaders have sometimes acted as if they could achieve integration by declaration,

or simply by joining and participating in international organizational and political clubs rather than by undertaking concrete structural changes' (1998:12).

This pattern of political and economic change in Ukraine can be attributed to the fact that following its exit from the USSR, political developments in Ukraine have been characterised by two features: first, the continued prominence of the ex-communist power elites and, second, the dominance of the executive, embodied in the presidency, over other branches of power. It is worth expounding on each of these points.

First, the continued presence and influence of the power elite stems directly from the fact that the ex-communist elites have not renounced their power since Ukraine's passage to independence. More specifically, after 1991, the communist cadre shed its communist ideology and membership of the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU), but retained its grip on power under the banner of asserting sovereignty and state building via its hold on key economic and political positions. Yet paradoxically, at the same time, the unreformed and unrepentant Communist Party has remained the single largest party (with the exception of 1992-93 when it was de-legalised) and until 1998 attracted the largest share of votes in parliamentary elections. This power was compounded by the fact that the democratic opposition was too weak to take over power upon and after the passage to independence. Moreover, its ability to create an effective opposition to the ex-communist elite was jeopardised by its support of the latter for the sake of state building and the integrity of the state. (Such threats included both seeing off threats to the territorial integrity of Ukraine, such as those presented by separatist forces in Crimea and the lack of recognition of Ukraine's border by some of its neighbours, as well as fostering a sense of nationhood around a common set of symbols, language and historical memories.) The threat of the 'red revenge', that is the return to power of anti-state, hardline communists, who questioned the very legitimacy of the Ukrainian state, pushed the democratic opposition into the former foes' embrace. This co-opting—which Wilson calls the 'great bargain' (2000:174)—helped the ex-communist elite to secure and legitimise its stay in power. The prioritisation of state building and the securing Ukraine's territorial integrity and control over territory, while a necessary precondition for democratisation, allowed the elites pursuing their own personal gains rather than the creation of a stable political regime in order to implement political and economic reforms. As a result, state building and democratisation turned out not to be mutually reinforcing in Ukraine (Wolczuk, 2002:289).

Second, as far as the dominance of the executive is concerned, the presidency became the flagship institution under the control of the non-ideological ex-communist elite upon Kuchma's coming to power in 1994. The section of this elite that gained control of the executive agencies of the state came to be known as the 'party of power'. The presidency (that is the institution which controls the cabinet of ministers and other executive state agencies) has been the key instrument for enacting the interests of the 'party of power' and protecting it from public and judicial scrutiny. By utilising constitutional prerogatives with informal political leverage, the presidency has come to overshadow other branches of power (legislature, judicial and regional governments), and neutralise most efforts at introducing effective 'checks and balances'.

The domination of the executive resulted in a highly asymmetrical distribution of power. The 'executive' tutelage of Kuchma enabled the members of the dominant elite to derive economic gain from access to political power. In the absence of effective scrutiny and accountability from other state institutions and the electorate, this led to a massive misappropriation of state assets and rent seeking. The influence of the presidency was increased from the late-1990s, when Kuchma's entourage came to be dominated by the so-called oligarchs, individuals whose access to political decision-making facilitated their economic pursuits. Admittedly, the oligarchs' interests have sometimes conflicted to the extent that by the late 1990s it was more appropriate to talk about the 'parties of power' rather than just one 'party of power'. But even though these regionally-based elite groupings under the control of individual oligarchs are in competition with each other, they all have secured a privileged relationship with the presidency. As a result, elite groupings rather than political parties have come to be the main actors on the Ukrainian political arena. Since the 1998 parliamentary elections, the president in the alliance with the oligarchs began also to control the composition of the legislature, both through the

electoral process as well as pursuing the ‘divide and rule’ strategy (let alone ‘blackmail and bribes’) in the parliament. At the same time it significantly restricted the freedom of the media.

The president in conjunction with the ‘parties of power’ succeeded in distorting the result of the ballot box in the 2002 elections. The outcome of the 2002 parliamentary elections was marked an apparently significant change in terms of electoral choices of the population. On one level, the pro-reform bloc, ‘Our Ukraine’, led by Viktor Yushchenko, seemingly achieved a ground-breaking victory with the largest share of votes (see table 1).⁴ The elections also indicated a change in the fortunes of the left-wing parties: for the first time since the collapse of the USSR, the reformers, rather than the left, emerged as the winners from a parliamentary electoral contest in Ukraine. However, on another level, the elections did not deliver the expected breakthrough in terms of a change in the balance of power. Although the reformist bloc had won the popular mandate, it soon lost ground in the legislature to the ‘parties of power’. They retained a firm grip on key executive positions and blocked any challenges which jeopardised their rent-seeking opportunities (for example in the energy sector). So even though the cassette scandal implicating Kuchma in the murder of a journalist critical of the regime that erupted in late 2000, has removed any vestige of popular support for the president in his second term, the incumbent appeared to have consolidated his power by 2002, as evidenced by the putting together of the pro-presidential ‘majority’ in parliament.⁵ This ‘majority’, consisting of oligarchic factions and lacking any clear ideological platform, was cajoled by the presidential entourage to support the president’s moves within parliament to prevent any effective exercise of ‘checks and balances’ prior to the 2004 presidential elections.

Table 1. Political Forces in Ukraine (after the 2002 parliamentary elections)

Orientation	Oppositional Forces				‘Parties of Power’
Political Party/Bloc	Communist Party	Socialist Party	Yulia Tymoshenko’s bloc	Bloc ‘Our Ukraine’	Bloc ‘For a United Ukraine’ and (United) Social Democratic Party
Leader(s)	Petro Symonenko	Oleksandr Moroz	Yulia Tymoshenko	Viktor Yushchenko	President Leonid Kuchma & oligarchs
Percentage of votes (on party lists) in March 2002 elections	20%	6.8%	7.3%	23.5%	11.7% + 6.2%
Number of seats in parliament (out of 450) in Feb 2003	60	20	18	102	212*

*By autumn 2002, the bloc had splintered into a number of smaller factions.

These institutional power asymmetries in Ukraine have enabled the dominant power elites, grouped around the presidency, to exploit opportunities for exploitative, rent-seeking behaviour, even though this is detrimental to Ukrainian state and society. The experience of such self-serving ‘reforms’ and ‘state-building’ has, in turn, deepened society’s disillusionment with politics in general and reforms in particular, leaving Ukrainian society politically disfranchised. Under Kuchma’s presidency, Ukraine matched many of the criteria for being classified as a dominant power regime (Carother, 2002:11-14), that is one in which some elements of democracy existed, such as regular elections and tolerance of

4 Yushchenko’s ‘Our Ukraine’ won the vote on party lists, but in the majoritarian districts the nominally independent candidates won, who once in parliament turned into docile instruments in the hands of the ‘parties of power’.

5 Also, the key positions within the executive branch (i.e. the prime minister, the finance minister and the head of the tax administration, chief state prosecutor) were handed out to people on the basis of their ability to ‘deliver results’ in favour of the president, rather than any reformist credentials.

some political opposition, but in which some political groupings dominated the system to prevent the transfer of power. In effect, the power elite gambled on preserving power almost regardless of the short- and long-term costs for the country, even if that resulted in the further deterioration of Ukraine's international standing, though, in contrast to Belarus, not to the point of risking severing contacts with Western states or institutions altogether.

Elections may allow Ukraine escape from the pitfalls of the dominant power regime. The fact that during the 2002 parliamentary elections the pro-reform party received the largest share of votes for the party lists was a positive sign in this regard. However, despite the fact that (or possibly because) it was facing a major onslaught from the executive, the opposition has been divided and ineffective, as evidenced by its inability to develop a coherent strategy, especially during the constitutional reform initiated by Kuchma's entourage in 2003.

Against the backdrop of these developments, the time for the presidential elections in autumn 2004, are seen in Ukraine as a crossroads: Ukraine can either continue to follow the post-Soviet, 'Eurasian model' currently pursued by the 'parties of power' or it can alter its trajectory and shift to the 'European path' of development (*Ukrainian Monitor*, 2003a). Their track record suggests that the 'European path' is unlikely to be pursued if the 'parties of power' retain control of the executive by installing one from their ranks as a new president. However, at the same time, the election of a pro-reform president is a necessary but not sufficient condition for enacting reforms in the domestic context (see below).

In this context, the gap between the apparent desire to integrate and the actual efforts to accelerate the domestic transformation to fulfil Ukraine's European aspirations has remained glaring. This contradictory stance towards the EU amounts to the apparent pursuit of integration but resistance to Europeanisation. It appears that while the benefits of participation in European integration are not lost on the Ukrainian elites, they have been incapable and/or unwilling to bring about the reforms in support of these intentions. The mismatch between the western orientation of the country's foreign policy elite and the floundering domestic political and economic reforms is at odds with the process of Europeanisation, which entails extensive change to institutions and policies at the domestic level to match external commitments vis-à-vis the EU.

In order to fully understand the reasons for this situation, sources of Ukraine's policy towards the European Union will now be outlined (section 2), followed by an analysis of why the 'European choice', which is not acted on in terms of domestic reforms, has, nevertheless, been proclaimed in Ukraine (section 3). The final section examines the conditions necessary for Europeanisation in Ukraine by drawing on the insights from the literature on the EU's eastern enlargement.

2. Ukrainian Elites' European Aspirations

2.1 Ukraine's Policy Towards the EU since 1991: an Overview

Until the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine was effectively non-existent as an international actor and remained unrecognised as such, despite its nominal presence of the United Nations as a founding member since 1945. Following its emergence as an independent state in December 1991, Ukraine quickly established bilateral relations with the EU member states; the relations with the Union itself developed slowly. After an uneventful first couple of years, Ukraine was the first CIS country to sign the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA) in June 1994, a fact of a considerable symbolic importance for Ukraine at the time. However, the delay (of nearly four years) in ratifying the PCA by the member states caused frustration in Ukraine. This frustration was exacerbated by the fact that by that time the Ukrainian leadership had decided to build on the initial progress by emulating the integration aspirations and trajectory of ECE, which were moving ever closer to EU accession (in 1998 the 'Luxembourg Six', that is Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus and Slovenia, opened accession negotiations with the Union). Having announced Ukraine's EU membership as a strategic objective in a speech in 1996, in June 1998 (only three

months after the PCA came into force), president Kuchma signed a decree entitled ‘Strategy on Ukraine’s Integration with the European Union’, which formally proclaimed membership of the EU as Ukraine’s long-term strategic goal and listed the key priority areas for integration—see Box 1 (Decree of the President of Ukraine, 1998). The more detailed ‘Programme of Ukraine’s Integration with the EU’ was adopted in September 2000, and, as will be argued below, became the basis for some limited institutional changes in Ukraine nominally to facilitate this integration (Decree of the President of Ukraine, 2000).⁶

Box 1. The Strategy of Ukraine’s Integration with the European Union (1998)

Main Directions:

1. Adaptation of the Legislation of Ukraine to the *Acquis Communautaire* of the EU, Protection of Human Rights
2. Economic Integration and Development of Trade Between Ukraine and the EU
3. Integration of Ukraine within the Context of Pan-European Security
4. Political Consolidation and the Strengthening of Democracy
5. Adaptation of the Social (Welfare) Policy of Ukraine to the Standards of the EU
6. Cultural and Educational, and Science and Technology Integration
7. Regional Integration of Ukraine
8. Sectoral Co-operation
9. Co-operation in Environmental Protection

In Ukraine considerable but unrealistic hopes were put on the Helsinki European Council in December 1999, where it was expected that Ukraine’s membership aspirations would be explicitly recognised by the Union. But the Ukrainian leadership had to satisfy itself with a ‘welcome’ of its ‘European choice’ (as opposed to explicit offer of membership), and the subsequent adoption of a Common Strategy (CS) on Ukraine, designed to add a boost to relations, but which maintained Ukraine’s status of that of an ‘outsider’. Despite this and keen to move beyond the PCA, Ukrainian foreign policy makers put forward a number of ambitious initiatives to deepen co-operation over 2000-01. The lack of response to those initiatives left Ukrainian foreign policy makers frustrated but not dispirited. Eager to reinforce any positive sign from the EU, Ukraine’s foreign policy makers welcomed the 2003 EU’s ‘New Neighbourhood/Wider Europe’ initiative (see below), which aims to ‘promote stability and prosperity in Union’s neighbourhood’, as an important step in overcoming the impasse in Ukraine’s relations with the EU but emphasising its perceived role of a stepping stone rather than an alternative to the country’s prospect of EU membership.

2.2 Why the ‘European Choice’?

Ukraine presents a whole portfolio of geographical, cultural, historical, economic and security reasons for wishing to join the EU (see Havrylyshyn, 2002: 15-18).

Unlike the case of Russia or Turkey, Ukraine’s geographic location in Europe is self-evident.⁷ Ukraine’s Europeanness is underlined by the frequent reference to the fact that the geographical centre of Europe, marked by the Vienna Geographic Society in 1911, is in Transcarpathian western Ukraine (Batt, 2002:155).⁸ The geographical justification goes hand in hand with historical claims to Europeanness,

6 At least to some extent, Ukraine became inspired by the Polish example as around that time Poland intensified its contacts with Ukraine and began to convey its experience of ‘returning to Europe’ under the auspices of the so-called ‘strategic partnership’ (see Wolczuk and Wolczuk, 2002: 6-28).

7 For example, the British ambassador to Ukraine, Robert Brinkley, asserted that ‘Ukraine is a European country in geographical and historical terms’ (*Zerkalo Nedeli*, 7 Dec 2002).

8 However, several other countries in the region, including Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Slovakia, have put forward similar claims to being the geographical centres of Europe.

such as the oft-referred to fact that in the eleventh century, Ann, the daughter of the Kievan-Rus ruler, Yaroslav the Wise, became the queen of France through marriage. This is, admittedly, 'Europeanness seen through the prism of a cycle of several centuries' (Guicherd, 2002:16). However, this form of Europeanness is emphasised because Ukrainians are only too aware of the fact that they lack more tangible, contemporary manifestations of Europeanness, such as democracy, a market economy, a welfare state and high standards of living. As a result, Ukraine's historical and geographical claims to Europeanness serve to underpin its demands for inclusion in contemporary Europe, defined specifically by membership of the EU. What many in the EU view as Ukraine's unrealistic expectations of the EU stem from the fact that Ukrainians tend to see the institution as a civilisation-based geopolitical entity, a perception shared by most post-communist, European countries.

The cost-benefit analysis of integration with the EU and the Commonwealth of Independence States (CIS), however implicit and rudimentary, seems to favour the Western vector over the eastern one, despite the extensive economic ties with Russia (see Wolczuk, 2003). The goal of joining the EU implies a desire to reverse Ukraine's technological backwardness and uncompetitiveness by gaining access to the credits, investments, technologies, assistance that come with membership of the Union, let alone access to its markets (Pavliuk, 1999:12). Because Russia and the CIS remain Ukraine's biggest trading partners, Ukraine is locked into an economic and political dependency without the prospect of modernising itself (by attracting Western funds, expertise and foreign investment, and improving the regulatory environment) and thereby raise the standards of living. Admittedly, Ukraine has posted economic growth since 2000, most notably a 9.5 percent increase of the GDP in 2003, after a decade of steep decline. So this growth is from a low base and needs to be sustained by structural reforms and foreign investment.

But it is mainly the geopolitical and security considerations that have since 1991 motivated Ukrainian policy makers to capitalise on Ukraine's European location and to seek membership of European sub-regional and regional institutions, such as the EU and NATO. The assertion of independence followed by Euro-Atlantic integration as an inherent foreign policy goal has been largely a response to Russia's difficulty with accepting Ukraine's sovereignty, fuelled by doubts regarding the legitimacy and viability of an independent Ukraine. In particular, from the second part of the 1990s Ukraine has put a premium on seeking closer relations with the EU. Aspirations to EU membership were voiced earlier and more persistently than NATO membership (Wolczuk, 2003) but, paradoxically, it was the latter where Ukraine made greater strides, following its unexpected and somewhat secretive decision to seek NATO membership in May 2002. NATO extended the prospect of membership to Ukraine, subject to political and military reforms.

The overemphasis on geopolitics, however, has distorted Ukraine's priorities vis-à-vis the EU. On independence, the Ukrainian elites cherished the thought that independent Ukraine's sheer size and geopolitical significance as a counterbalance to Russia would guarantee it attention from the West. Indeed, the marked increase in US interest in Ukraine in the second part of the 1990s (and, to a lesser extent, in 2003) buttressed this conviction and accounted for a sense of complacency on the part of Kyiv stemming from the premise that Ukraine was simply 'too important to fail'.

Due to this fixation with geopolitics, Ukrainian elites have been slow in realising that for the EU, Ukraine's democratic development and economic performance matter far more than its size and geopolitical location. The much-emphasised size of the country (in terms of territory and population) has actually proved to be a drawback, exacerbated by Ukraine's economic impotence. Because of this focus on geopolitical factors and the under-appreciation of the political, legal economic dimensions, Ukraine has paid little attention to the importance of meeting contractual obligations with the Union, such as the fulfilling the criteria of the PCA, resulting in a loss of credibility in the EU. The realisation emerge in Ukraine that its geopolitical 'attractiveness'—as a counterbalance to Russia—is far from sufficient to secure integration with Europe only emerged in the late 1990s once it had become clear that Ukraine was being 'cold shouldered' by the EU.

In essence, Ukraine's motivation for joining the EU appears similar to this driving post-communist states' 'return to Europe', namely the historical and geographical reasons as well as economic and security benefits of a given states' membership of the EU. Ukraine, however, differs from the CEE states in terms of the fact that the latter were more willing to meet the multitudinous and stringent conditions necessary for EU accession.

It has been argued convincingly that by providing the prospect of membership to some post-communist countries, the EU has itself played an active role in stimulating the reforms in preparation for accession. The fact that Ukraine has not been explicitly offered such a prospect may partially explain the difference between Ukraine and ECE in the implementation of reforms. Yet, in ECE, the determination to join the EU made them act on 'normative targets' before the EU acknowledged their prospect of membership. The fact that ECE countries persisted with reforms even before they were offered a prospect of membership in 1993 whereas Ukraine has actually reversed some of its reforms, suggests that the prospect of membership alone does not fully explain the difference between Ukraine and ECE. Therefore, a lack of the prospect of membership itself does not provide an answer as to why foreign policy declarations have become a trademark of Ukraine's 'return to Europe' under president Kuchma. The following section will explore this divergence by having a closer look at the domestic configuration of forces, both at the societal- and elite-levels.

3. 'Europe' in Ukraine's Domestic Politics and Policy Making

3.1 Societal Support for European Integration

The multiple (religious, cultural, ethno-linguistic and political) divisions running through Ukrainian society have been the subject of numerous studies. Arguably this is one of the best-researched aspects of contemporary Ukraine. Still, when it comes to foreign policy, these multiple divisions make analysis of public opinion difficult and open to conflicting interpretations.

In general, the population seems deeply divided over foreign policy choices. Broadly, in most opinion polls conducted since 1991, when presented with a choice, one-third of the population favours a pro-European orientation whereas a slightly greater proportion supports Ukraine's reintegration with Russia or the Commonwealth of Independent States (or another regional organisation, union or bloc created on the territory of the former Soviet Union and centred on Russia). In geographical terms, the western provinces of the country are most favourably disposed to the west, whereas the eastern and southern oblasts⁹ favour closer ties with Russia and the CIS.

In terms of European integration alone, according to a recent survey, 58 percent of the population supports Ukraine's membership of the EU with 16 percent opposed and 26 percent undecided. As with foreign policy in general so in terms of attitudes to integration with the EU, important regional differences are in evidence. In western Ukraine, Ukraine's membership of the EU is favoured by three quarters of the population (and opposed by 9 percent), whereas in predominantly Russophone southern Ukraine less than half of respondents believe that Ukraine should join the EU (47 percent in favour and 23.5 percent opposed) (*Natsionalna Bezpeka i Oborona*, 2002:35-45). But the issue of EU membership is less divisive within Ukraine than the issue of integration with Russia, which is largely supported in eastern Ukraine but staunchly opposed in western Ukraine. In other words, the east Ukrainian population is less opposed to 'Europe' than the western part of Ukraine is to Russia.

These foreign policy attitudes are structured and closely correlated with party orientation and support for reforms. Supporters of the European orientation tend to favour political and economic reforms, while those who favour the Russia/CIS-orientation are more likely to vote for communists (White *et al*, 2002).

9 Oblasts are the largest territorial-administrative units in Ukraine.

However, other public opinion surveys indicate an even more complex situation. When the levels of support for integrating with Europe and Russia/CIS are compared in public opinion surveys in the form of multiple choices (i.e. not mutually exclusive), many people in Ukraine appear to favour the simultaneous strengthening of ties with Russia/the CIS *and* Europe. This suggests that even though society in general is keen on European integration, the Ukrainian public sees no contradiction between seeking EU membership and closer political and economic ties with Russia/CIS, despite the fact that Russia has been pursuing regional integration within the post-Soviet area as an alternative to the EU, and has not expressed the intention of joining the EU itself. Undoubtedly, Ukrainian society at large is ill-informed about the dynamics of European integration. According to a 2003 survey, 93 percent of those surveyed assume that entering the EU would be useful for Ukraine, but only half of them were able to explain what the benefits might be (*Ukrainian Monitor*, 2003b). In 2000 as many as 60 percent supported Ukraine's entry in the next five years, notwithstanding the total lack of feasibility of this scenario. Ukraine is not unique in this respect, however. A high degree of confusion and/or ignorance about the EU, has been also been identified in the ECE candidate states and it has been only partially alleviated by the media coverage of the accession negotiations. Where Ukraine differs from ECE, however, is in terms of degree of support for simultaneous integration with the West and East, a propensity, which also been detected in Belarus (*RFE Report*, 2003). The Ukrainian political scientist Mykola Riabchuk (1999) attributes these confused preferences to a profoundly ambivalent post-Soviet consciousness prevailing in Ukraine, which manifests itself in simultaneous societal support for mutually exclusive values, principles, policies and orientations. The population of Eastern regions of Ukraine favours closer ties with Russia, while simultaneously supporting economic and political integration with the West, and does not perceive the two orientations as mutually exclusive.

The fact that apparent divisions are significantly softened by societal ambivalence leaves the Ukrainian elites with a relatively free hand when it comes to the foreign policy formation. In particular, the fact that the 'Eastern choice' electorate does not oppose the 'European choice', whereas the western Ukrainian supporters of the latter are more likely to strongly oppose the 'Eastern option' offers the elites the freedom to seek Ukraine's integration with the EU. But no public discussion on the costs and benefits of this goal has taken place. As a result, the ebbs and flows of Ukraine's European orientation result almost exclusively from elite-level preferences, rather than either the strong endorsement or explicit opposition from society.

3.2 Political Elites and the 'European Choice'

Ukraine's political scene comprises numerous entities, many of which, however, tend to be ephemeral and unstable, as evidenced by their nebulous ideological platforms, changing membership, and tenuous links with the electorate. The main ones are represented in the legislature (Verkhovna Rada), the composition of which reflects foreign policy preferences of the political elites.

The 2002 parliamentary elections delivered yet another line-up of contestants and a new set up of apparent 'winners' (see table 1). The left was made up of the hardline Communist Party of Ukraine and its more moderate, reformist ally, the Socialist Party of Ukraine. The right was occupied by the newly formed bloc 'Our Ukraine', led by Viktor Yushchenko, former Prime Minister, who advocated systematic economic reforms.¹⁰ The so-called centre was nebulous, being made up of parties and groupings without a clear-cut ideological profile serving instead the personal and group interests of its members, such as the (United) Social Democratic Party of Ukraine. However, the ideological cleavages have been overshadowed by the Rada's ongoing conflict with the presidency, which split

10 The moderate, right-wing forces in the 2002 parliamentary elections were not only pro-European but also put more emphasis on reforming the economy. This set them apart from the 'old' democratic opposition, the so-called national-democrats, who neglected the economic dimension, owing to their prioritisation of the 'national question', language, symbols and history. The government led by the leader of the bloc, Viktor Yushchenko, introduced policies that markedly improved the performance of the Ukrainian economy.

the Ukrainian political scene and parliament into pro- and anti-presidential forces, although the division was not always consistent. The former includes the centrist, oligarchic parties, and the later consists of members of the left and the right-wing parties (as well as the bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko, whose charismatic leader is vociferously opposed to president Kuchma).

In spite of the divisions on domestic issues, the national elites seemed more favourably disposed towards a 'European choice' than is the population. When it comes to foreign policy preferences, no political force represented in parliament overtly opposed Ukraine's integration with the EU.

Table 2. Foreign Policy Preferences of the Main Political Parties (March 2002)

Issues	Communist Party	Socialist Party	Yulia Tymoshenko's bloc	'Our Ukraine'	'For a United Ukraine'
Should Ukraine join the EU?	X	X	X	X	X
When is it necessary to pursue EU membership in practical terms?					
Within the next 5 years				X	
Within the next 10 years		X			X
Within the next 20 years	X		X		
Should Ukraine join NATO?					
Yes				X	
No	X				
It is a matter for the distant future		X	X		X
What should Ukraine's policy towards the CIS be?					
Play a more active role	X	X		X	
Maintain the current level of involvement			X		X
Leave the CIS					
Should Ukraine join the Tashkent (defence) Treaty of the CIS countries?					
Yes	X				
No			X	X	X
Difficult to say		X			
Should Ukraine join the (political) Union of Russia and Belarus?					
Yes	X				
No			X	X	X
Difficult to say		X			
Should Ukraine join the Eurasian Economic Association?					
Yes	X		X		
No				X	X
Difficult to say		X			
Which countries have the strongest influence on Ukraine's foreign policy?					
EU					
US	X	X	X		
Russia		X		X	
Difficult to say					X

Source: *Natsionalna Bezpeka i Oborona*, 2002:28-31.

That is not to say there were no points of disagreements. The moderate, right wing, represented by 'Our Ukraine' bloc headed by Viktor Yushchenko, was most consistent in its pro-Western (pro-EU and NATO) orientation, whereas the Communist Party was least supportive, and, in fact, consistently favoured only Ukraine's political, economic and security integration with Russia/the CIS. The remaining parliamentary factions hover somewhere between these two extreme positions (see table 2). Moreover the apparent

consensus on closer integration with the EU was accompanied by noticeable discrepancies on the optimal strategy for pursuing this integration (see below). Nevertheless, the fact that even the hardline communists with their pro-Russian foreign policy orientation did not object to Ukraine's EU membership, indicates the extent to which supporting European integration has taken on the 'logic of appropriateness',¹¹ which no major political actor dares to violate in the context of assertions of Ukraine's Europeanness.

Symptomatically, even though they differed in their view on Ukraine's foreign policy priorities, none of the forces (including the pro-European ones) believed the EU has a strong influence on Ukraine (see 'Policy Papers', 2002-03). The EU's impact on Ukraine's domestic politics has been perceived as marginal, in contrast to the influence of the US and Russia. This situation also contrasted starkly with the case of the ECE accession countries, where the EU has exerted a major influence upon domestic actors and policy making. Clearly, the EU has not developed a political role in Ukraine.

Overall, the political elites were more favourably disposed towards integration with the EU than was the population at large. But being better informed on the subject, they were more sceptical about the feasibility of the 'European prospects' for Ukraine, mainly due to the lack of interest in Ukraine by the EU (*Razumkov Centre Yearbook*, 2001:134).

Despite repeated declarations by Ukrainian officials in external fora, the concrete implications of the 'European choice' barely feature in the domestic political debate, nor do they inform policy making in Kyiv. That pro-European declarations have not been accompanied by domestic policy changes can be attributed to the high costs of compliance with the EU's 'normative targets' for the Ukrainian 'parties of power'. These high costs have been determined by political developments in post-Soviet Ukraine which—as outlined in section 2—are characterised by two features: first, the continuity of the power elites and, second, the dominance of the executive, embodied in the presidency, over other branches of power. These two features—which have characterised post-Soviet 'transitions', with the exception of the three Baltic states—have created strong incentives for widespread rent-seeking behaviour and militated against sustained implementation of reforms by the ruling elite grouped around the presidency.

3.3 Uses and Abuses of the 'European Choice'

Despite the aforementioned violation of 'European standards' in the domestic context, the dominant elite still remains pro-European in its declarations. But even though the analysis of the political dynamic in Ukraine gives some insight into why Ukraine has experienced stuttering reforms under the tutelage of president Kuchma, it does not explain why the self-interested elite, which benefits from extensive rent seeking, actually seeks integration with the EU and other regional institutions. Indeed it has been the presidency that has been the source of pro-European declarations in Ukraine. This situation contrasts with other post-communist regimes with authoritarian and rent-seeking leadership, such as Slovakia under Meciar or Serbia under Milosevic, where political practices, which fell short of 'European standards', were accompanied by anti-European rhetoric, a rise of nationalism and anti-Western and/or isolationist foreign policies. This section aims to shed light on why Ukraine does not conform to this pattern. It will be argued that for the dominant elite seeking European integration has served as an important legitimising, discursive resource both in internal and external contexts. There are two reasons for this.

First, in the domestic context, the proclamation of European aspirations fills an ideological void. It boosts the legitimacy of the current regime which has made the achievement of prosperity, peace and stability, those very qualities embodied in Europe, the cornerstone of its otherwise rather sparse ideological platform. In some post-communist countries in the 1990s, such as Slovakia or Romania, rent-seeking elites resorted to ethno-nationalism to boost their legitimacy. There, the ethnonationalist agenda directly conflicted with the proclaimed 'return to Europe'

11 The logic of appropriateness occurs in instances when human actors' pursuit of purpose is associated with identities more than with interests (March and Olsen: 1999: 311).

and jeopardised their prospects for integration with the EU, as was the case in Slovakia under Meciar (Vachudova, 2001). In contrast, however, politicians within Ukraine have largely resisted playing the ethno-nationalist card. Some nationalising policies, such as the linguistic Ukrainisation of the education sector, have been pursued, but often in an inconsistent way. The dominant Ukrainian elites did not attempt to politicise the ‘national question’, for two reasons. Firstly, given the large Russian minority in Ukraine (17 percent of the total population according to the 2001 census), any politicisation of the ‘national question’ would risk destabilising Ukraine. Second, there is no support for ethno-nationalism amongst the titular majority, namely the ethnic Ukrainians. Ethnic identities tend to be weak in Ukraine and the regime has been careful not to mobilise them (or where they were stronger like in the Crimean peninsula, not to politicise them further). Indeed, preserving multiethnic stability has been a significant (though rare) achievement of Ukraine’s ex-communist elites.

Since 1991, Ukrainian elites largely rejected the imperative of the ethnocultural and linguistic homogenisation of Ukraine (despite some half-hearted policies) instead nurturing the aspiration of rejoining the modern and prosperous ‘European civilisation’. And while Ukrainian society has experienced the ineffectiveness of the state—as evidenced by the plummeting living standards, endemic corruption and the dramatic deterioration of public services—simultaneously the Ukrainian leadership promises prosperity through seeking closer ties with the European Union, (that is ‘Europe’ in the popular discourse both in the EU and in Ukraine). In the officially formulated narrative of identity, the elaboration of the particularistic historical credentials of Ukraine as a nation state coexists with proclaimed aspirations to peace, welfare and prosperity, most tangibly encapsulated in the term Europeaness (Wolczuk, 2000). As a result, Ukraine’s identity and statehood are defined as European rather than Eurasian, even though the standards of public life fall short of ‘European standards’.

In the discursive realm, Ukrainian independence has been firmly couched in terms of regaining the balance between the East and West, as both geographical and cultural entities have shaped Ukraine over time, despite most often than not the West being ‘squeezed out’ by the East, that is by the dominance of Russia (ibid). In other words, Ukraine’s independence has been inherently linked to the reclamation of its Europeaness. Despite his coming to power on a platform of opposition to romantic nationalism in 1994, Kuchma soon began to draw from the repertoire of ideas composed by twentieth century Ukrainian intellectuals about Ukraine’s organic distinctiveness from Russia (Riabchuk, 2003). From this perspective, with Europe being a marker of identity, there appears no viable alternative to proclaiming ‘an entry into Europe’ (*vhid v Evropu*) and demanding EU’s endorsement of this choice by extending the prospect of membership to Ukraine.

Secondly, the proclamation of a ‘European choice’ serves a valuable function in external relations. For the Ukrainian dominant elite, ‘Europe’ forms a pivotal component of its multi-vectored foreign policy strategy, insofar as it serves as a counterbalance to the pull of Russia.

Since the break-up of the USSR, Russia has sought to draw Ukraine into closer political and economic ties, viewing Ukraine’s regional integration along the western axis as a threat to its geopolitical interests. This is because Moscow continues to perceive Ukraine’s rapprochement with the West as a zero-sum game, rather than a win-win situation (Pavliuk, 1999:8).¹² Given the nature of long-standing historical, economic, religious, ethnic and cultural ties, Ukraine has maintained close ties with Russia both at the societal and elite levels. Nevertheless, unlike neighbouring Belarus, the Ukrainian dominant elites have resisted the pressure to re-integrate with Russia or a Russia-dominated CIS (Wolczuk, 2003:64-68; D’Anieri, 2002; Chudowsky, 2002; Molchanov, 2002). Kuchma’s first presidency (1994-99) was a period during which the national economic elite was formed, consolidated its position and resisted the access of external actors into key economic sectors (Puglisi, 2003). But following this consolidation the elite became more interested in closer integration with Russia insofar as their economic interests required, but, crucially, without jeopardising Ukraine’s political independence. Following unsuccessful and inconsistent attempts to exert political and economic

12 On the attitudes of the Russian political elites towards Ukraine see also results of a survey in *Razumkov Centre Yearbook* (2001:124-131).

pressure on Ukraine in the 1990s, Russia has pursued a more ‘pragmatic’ approach under Putin by focusing on the economic benefits of integration. Being semi-isolated from the West in the aftermath of the Gongadze affair, Kuchma responded to Russian offer in 2000. Macroeconomic stabilisation achieved in the second part of 1990s and growth from 2000 onwards did little to increase Ukraine’s attractiveness for foreign direct investment from the West while Russia was eager to move into the Ukrainian market, especially in the energy and metallurgical sector. In addition, Russia has offered the prospect of lower prices for energy and the lowering of trade barriers as an incentive for Ukraine to join, initially, the Eurasian Economic Community (comprising, apart from Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), and, then, the Common Economic Space (CES), (comprising only Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan), which Ukraine joined in September 2003. Being dependent on energy supplies from Russia and access to the Russian market, Ukraine has sought closer economic cooperation, most of all access to the market, but eschewed political integration.

In this context, Ukraine’s European aspirations remain an important tool for putting limits on its integration with Russia. The state leadership is adamant that the proclamation of a ‘strategic partnership’ (most of all in the economic sphere) with Russia complements rather than contradicts the overarching objective of ‘entering Europe’. Driven by business interests, some Ukrainian politicians put a premium on closer economic ties with the Russian Federation. But even they couch this preference in terms of a European orientation, namely ‘to Europe together with Russia’.¹³ The debates over signing the Yalta agreement on the CES in September 2003 in Ukraine indicated that while Ukraine has sought the economic benefits of lower trade barriers with Russia, Kyiv has been wary of committing itself to anything more than a free trade area, something which Russia sees as a stepping stone towards far reaching economic integration modelled on the European single market. It is evident that the Ukrainian elite has sought to keep the Eastern option open insofar as this served their particular interests. This has resulted in a situation where Ukraine enters into commitment with different partners without undertaking a transparent analysis of costs and benefits of pursuing integration along different vectors or an overall assessment of the compatibility of simultaneous integration with the EU and CES.¹⁴

The search for seeking closer ties with European institutions is unlikely to abate in Ukraine, because insofar as the political elites are concerned, there is no effective alternative for Ukraine. On the one hand, Europeanness has been a pivotal part of the post-independence political discourse in the domestic context and, on the other, it has been a device to put limits on integration with Russia, beyond the scope needed to serve particular sectoral and group interests in Ukraine. At the same time, Kuchma called for pragmatic realism. The pursuit of economic integration with Russia is justified in terms of the EU’s unwillingness to welcome Ukraine’s ‘European choice’. Nevertheless, as Gould has pointed out, ‘the existence of an eastern option for Ukraine, and especially one that ostensibly leads to Brussels [‘to Europe together with Russia’], influences the overall context for Ukrainian decision-making and militates against a sustained and unequivocal choice of EU rules’ (Gould, 2003).

3.4 The Institutional Framework for European Integration

The low substantive as compared to declarative priority assigned to ‘Europe’ by the power elites is reflected in the weakness of the institutional framework devoted to European integration and the low salience of the ‘European choice’ for the state administration.

The presidency has been the main driving force behind Ukraine’s ‘European choice’. Owing to the domination of the presidency on the Ukrainian political landscape, European integration was initially proclaimed only by the presidency, which did not seek nor obtain endorsement from other state institutions, such as parliament, and society

13 Nevertheless, the change of strategy captured by the slogan would amount to an important qualification to Kyiv’s official policy towards the EU, implying that it is Russia’s policy towards the EU that will set the pace and scope of Ukraine’s integration with ‘Europe’ (*RFE/RL Newslines*, 2002).

14 One of the very few analyses was undertaken in a report ‘Ukraine-EU on the Road to 4 Freedoms’, published in 2003.

at large. For example, the key documents outlining the goals and strategy vis-à-vis the EU, namely the 'Strategy and Ukraine's Integration with the European Union' (1998) and 'the Programme of Ukraine's Integration with the EU' (2000), were adopted by presidential decrees rather than by parliamentary process.

At the same time, the actual political behaviour of the presidential administration is at odds with its pro-European intentions. Firstly, some key individuals in the presidential administration continue to favour a multi-vectored foreign policy as opposed to unambiguously pro-EU stance. The result is an inconsistent and volatile foreign policy, whereby 'strategic partnerships' are announced in response to immediate priorities rather than long-term strategic thinking (see *RFE/RL Newslines*, 2002). Also, Ukraine has wavered in its cooperation within the CIS, as highlighted by the signing up to the Eurasian Economic Space in February and then Common Economic Space in September 2003 in the context of Ukraine's refusal to fully integrate with the CIS' area (see, for example, *Janes' Foreign Report*, 2003, *Den*, 2003, *Oxford Analytica East Europe Daily Brief*, 2003). Secondly, and even more importantly, it is the presidential apparatus, which is behind the fits and starts of Ukrainian reform, whereby declarations are followed by few systemic reforms. Paradoxically, although it has been the source of pro-European declarations, Kuchma's presidency simultaneously appears to be the greatest obstacle to realising them. This is not only because of the ongoing deterioration of democratic standards, something in which the presidential administration, headed by Viktor Medvedchuk, a prominent Ukrainian oligarch, played a major role. At a personal level, the implication of Kuchma in the disappearance and the murder of a journalist and in the selling of arms to Iraq, meant that the incumbent, the main proponent of Ukraine's integration into the EU, became an outright liability in Ukraine's European integration.

To some extent the situation is mitigated by the actions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), which has gone out of its way to counteract the inconsistencies between the proclamations and the deeds of the Ukrainian leadership. The MFA, which is vested with the task of pursuing Ukraine's 'European choice' on a day-to-day basis, is manned by many pro-European officials (notable among them for his activity was the former deputy minister, Oleksandr Chalyi, who resigned in May 2004). In practice, the MFA has endeavoured to foster closer ties with the EU, in the absence of the requisite of positive 'reform balance sheet'.

The MFA is clearly committed to the 'European choice' as evidenced by its internalisation of new norms and rules of appropriateness through the process of social learning. Indeed, the MFA acts as a transmission belt for messages on 'European standards'. For example, Chalyi pointed out to the domestic audience that for the international community, the results *per se* of the 2004 presidential elections are less important than is the conduct of the elections in terms of freedom, fairness and transparency. However, the overall position of the MFA in the governmental structures is relatively weak, not only because of the relatively low standing of the foreign minister Konstantyn Gryshchenko in the Cabinet of Ministers, but also because of the dominant role of the presidential administration, which has enacted interests of the dominant elite in Ukraine.

In addition to the efforts of the MFA, at the instigation of the President, steps have been taken to provide an institutional framework for European integration. The name and portfolio of the Ministry of Economy were changed to include the term 'European Integration' (MEEI) with a concurrent change to its portfolio (to include economic aspects of integration), while within the MFA a special Department for European Integration was created. Also steps have been taken towards the harmonisation of Ukrainian legislation with that of the EU, coordinated by the Ministry of Justice. Complicating the scene somewhat was the decision in January 2003 to create a new body, the State Council for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, decreed by president Kuchma and tasked with coordinating Ukraine's political, economic, security and legislative integration with the European Union and NATO. The creation of the body highlighted the problem of over-institutionalisation, competition and the lack of coordination.¹⁵ At the same time, the state apparatus remains starved of skilled

15 The Council is chaired by the president of Ukraine, who appoints the secretary and members of the council. The council includes the prime minister of Ukraine, the head of the presidential administration, the secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, the foreign minister, the minister of economics and European integration, the minister

bureaucrats, knowledgeable in various aspects of European integration. For example, regular interactions with the EU under the auspices of the PCA (coordinated by the MFA) revealed the deficit of appropriate expertise within the Ukrainian bureaucracy. Acute shortages of competent Ukrainian civil servants hamper cooperation with the EU on specific, sectoral areas (author's interview with an official from the Department for European Integration, the MFA, Dec 2002).

Despite the above initiatives, much of Ukraine's bureaucracy remains ambiguous and/or indifferent to integration with the EU (Pavliuk, 2001:73). Many of the initiatives remain little more than that in the absence of efforts to address existing problems troubling Ukraine's administrative apparatus. The poor coordination between the institutions mentioned above is also the result of competition between the two key bodies involved in European integration. For example, this was evident in the diverging reactions of two Ukrainian ministries, both of them most pro-European in the government, to the 'New Neighbourhood/Wider Europe Initiative' in the spring of 2003. While the MFA welcomed the initiative only as a step on the way to the final goal of membership, the MEEI, driven by the sectoral concerns of the ministry, welcomed the EU's proposals, regardless of the fact that they did not fully correspond to Ukraine's officially proclaimed goal ('Ukraine-EU on the Road to 4 Freedoms', 2003). These divergent reactions stemmed from inter-institutional competition and the MEEI's desire to replace the MFA as the key agent for European integration within the Ukrainian government, as well as its pragmatic focus of the ministry's sectoral priorities, namely securing access to the EU market.

Significantly, the 2002 parliamentary elections brought about the activation of the Ukrainian parliament (Verkhovna Rada) on European integration, which had up until that point been somewhat non-committal on the issue. Building on the results of the parliamentary hearings on European integration in December 2001, a parliamentary committee on European integration was created in the aftermath of the 2002 elections.¹⁶ The head of this committee, former foreign affairs minister Borys Tarasiuk, has sought parliament's endorsement for seeking EU and NATO membership, and responsibility for co-ordinating parliamentary measures related to European integration.¹⁷

Structured and regular interactions with the Union within the institutional framework of the PCA, as well as lessons learnt from the experience of ECE led to a better understanding of the conditions for membership of the EU by the MFA. By 2001, some state officials in Ukraine were less inclined to emphasise Ukraine's geopolitical location and acknowledge that, ultimately, Ukraine would have to introduce domestic reforms if it was to move closer to the legal, economic and social standards of the Union.¹⁸ The term 'Copenhagen criteria', the political and economic criteria that the candidate states in ECE had to satisfy to become members (outlined by the EU in 1993), started to find its way into the vocabulary of (an albeit minority) Ukraine's state officials.

Overall, since 1998 Ukraine has expanded the institutional framework for European integration but without alleviating the problems troubling Ukraine's state apparatus at large, such as inefficiency, corruption, poor coordination and lack of resources. The procrastination in administrative reform in Ukraine is a corollary of the reluctance of the dominant sections of the political elites to embark on reforms.

Even though undoubtedly a wide array of state institutions have become involved (and developed a stake) in Ukraine's European integration, the actual domestic awareness of the implications of the 'European choice' remains low, despite it being routinely invoked by the Ukrainian leadership. In this

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of defence, the justice minister, the president of the National Academy of Sciences, the director of the National Institute of Strategic Studies and the head of the National Centre for European Integration.

16 The head of this committee is Borys Tarasiuk, a pro-western former foreign affairs minister. However, two other relevant committees, namely the committee on national security and defence, and the committee on foreign affairs, are headed respectively by Hryhoriy Kriuchkov and Dmytro Tabachnyk, who favour a multi-vectored foreign policy.

17 This committee was behind the 'Appeal by the Ukrainian Supreme Council to parliaments, Governments and People of the European Union Member States', 20 June 2002 (*Holos Ukrainy*, 2002).

18 This is the opinion of Oleksandr Chalyi, the then state secretary for European integration at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Natsionalna Bezpeka i Oborona*, 2001:34).

context, the 'European choice' remains largely confined to foreign policy making and as such does not inspire domestic decision making in any significant way.

3.5. The Way Forward for Ukraine's Relations with the EU: the Reformist Agenda

Since 1999 the Ukrainian leadership has been fixated on acquiring an offer of the prospect of membership, despite the lack of readiness for this in Ukraine and within the EU.

Owing to the lack of understanding of the internal functioning of the EU, there is little appreciation in Ukraine of the EU's reluctance to consider Ukraine as a potential member. These include the considerable fear of endless expansion and the impending paralysis of the EU's institutions as a result of the 2004 enlargement, despite the adaptation of institutions and procedures to accommodate the larger number of member states. This is aside from the fear of the dangers of offering membership to a country as large and poor as Ukraine and its impact on the EU's cohesion and capabilities (see Guicherd, 2002:12-14). Few in Ukraine fully understand the nature of the decision-making process within the EU and perhaps even less are aware of the lack of overall strategy and coherence in the EU's approach to eastward enlargement, and the extent to which the accession of new member states compounds the problem of any further enlargement.

From the Ukrainian perspective, the EU's equivocal or openly negative replies to demands for recognition of membership prospects, smacks of double standards. Policy makers in Ukraine object to being treated differently from other 'transformation laggards' in Eastern Europe (let alone Turkey). They point to Romania, which opened negotiations in 2000 and are expected to join the Union in 2007, even though its record of transformation is, in many respects, not much better than that of Ukraine. (They do not seem to realise that that this poor record weakens Romania's case rather than strengthens Ukraine's.) The EU's policy towards the Western Balkan countries, such as Albania, Croatia and Macedonia, which have been offered the 'European perspective' in a bid to foster stability and prosperity in the region, evokes even greater dismay in Ukraine. The then foreign minister of Ukraine, Anatolii Zlenko, drew attention to the essential inconsistencies between the EU's approach to Ukraine and that towards the ECE accession states and the Western Balkan countries, arguing:

Having proclaimed European integration as a priority in our foreign policy, Ukraine received quite an unexpected response. While the countries of Eastern Europe were told "we will admit you to the EU, but only after you have carried out reforms and met certain criteria" Ukraine was told "first you must carry out reforms and meet certain criteria and only after will we discuss the possibility of membership" (Zlenko, 2001:22).

Ukrainian foreign policy makers insist that 'the EU policy towards Ukraine has to be directed toward supporting the European integration of Ukraine' (see 'Strengthening of relations between the future enlarged EU and Ukraine'). They argue that offering the prospect of membership would be the only explicit evidence of this.

The insistence on the prospect of membership amongst the advocates of European integration in Ukraine stems from the belief that Ukraine's pro-European declarations offer the EU the opportunity to play a similar catalytic role to that it played in stimulating reforms in ECE where the political and economic transformation became equated with preparation for membership. As one Ukrainian diplomat put it: 'EU membership is a mirage, but it can mobilise us domestically' (author's interview, Dec 2002). To this end, the reformers in Ukraine hope that, the EU would step in to provide much needed guidelines for domestic policy making. Therefore, Oleksandr Chalyi, the then deputy foreign minister of Ukraine, advocated following in the footsteps of ECE, where associate status with a prospect of membership was accompanied by extensive conditionality, monitoring of compliance and targeted assistance:

We should use the current hopefuls' experience, rather than invent something new. I mean we would like to follow their model of European-type association. Probably something will have to be modified as EU-Ukraine relations may have their own specific points. There are three things that are absolutely indispensable in a future agreement on Ukraine-EU association. These include a

clear-cut recognition of Ukraine's right to integrate with the EU, creation of binding joint instruments and instructions based on this agreement and a new concept of technical aid. The existing TACIS [...] programme should be transformed on the basis of the philosophy underlying the PHARE programme. It is intended to transform society to fit EU standards (*Den*, 2003).

Given these expectations vis-à-vis the Union, the proponents of deeper Europeanisation in Ukraine have been especially critical of the EU's policy towards Ukraine. In particular, they complained about the PCA and the Common Strategy as inadequate instruments for stimulating domestic transformation in Ukraine.

4. Prospects for Europeanisation in Ukraine

Pro-European, pro-reform politicians in Ukraine put high hopes on the galvanising effect of being offered the prospect of membership. Yet it is doubtful whether the mere offer of the prospect of membership would be a sufficient stimulus for accelerating the domestic transformation. Studies of eastern enlargement suggest that the congruence of domestic policy implementation with the demands of inclusion in the European Union is, in fact, contingent on several factors. These factors can be divided into two groups: endogenous and exogenous. The first group relates to domestic politics and includes elite change and their acceptance of EU conditionality, whereas exogenous factors are concerned with the extent of the EU's influence, namely the application of both symbolic and substantive leverage. These factors will now be examined in turn against the backdrop of Ukraine's domestic politics and the EU's policy towards Ukraine.

4.1 Endogenous Factors

At the domestic level the coming to power of new political actors, with a greater and consistent level of commitment to entering the EU is a necessary condition for a shift from the declarative to deeper mode of Europeanisation.

As elsewhere, in Ukraine elite change can come about as a result of electoral preferences through the ballot box. Apart from the isolated effort to force the incumbent into resignation between 2001-03 for his alleged role in the murder of a journalist critical of the regime, by and large, the electorate has tended to abstain from political action beyond the ballot box. However, when the opportunity does present itself, the electorate makes its views clear as was the case in 2002 when the pro-reform party got the largest percentage of the vote in the parliamentary elections (see above). The existence of a political opposition and recurring mass protests in Ukraine represent the most serious challenges to the ongoing 'presidentialisation' of politics in any of the post-Soviet states. The 'parties of power', however, can mobilise extensive resources to prevent their loss of power. With very limited popular appeal, the 'parties' are bound to rely even more heavily on 'administrative resources' (i.e. the abuse of state power) and its tight control of the media than in 2002 to ensure a favourable result at the ballot box.

Only the access to power of new, reform-minded elites, who regard Europe as Ukraine's natural destination, could turn the phrase 'return to Europe' into a meaningful slogan in domestic politics. According to sociological institutionalism, Europeanisation leads to domestic change through a socialisation and collective learning process, which results in norm internalization. Grabbe argues that in ECE the accession process coincided with a need to fill a vacuum in the political leadership during the post-communist transition. ECE accepted EU conditionality because of the need for a model of democracy and economic order, and, secondly, an inability to define for themselves what needed to be done to improve the functioning of the state (1999:35-36). Some observers pointed out that the large-scale substitution of domestic policy making with EU conditionality contributed to the elimination of much of the dialogue about state policy alternatives, and thereby undermined the development of a capacity for indigenous policy development (Grzymala-Busse and Innes, 2002:68 and 'Report on Political Dimensions', 2002). In some cases, such as in Hungary, the concentration on technocratic and bureaucratic criteria, requirements and procedures resulted in the non-politicisation of the reform

process altogether (ibid). In Ukraine, however, there has been no real debate on public policy choices nor has the capacity to implement them been developed. It is simply assumed in Ukraine that EU conditionality would fill a glaring policy and capacity vacuum.¹⁹ In other words, it is assumed that pro-European elites could perform the role of transmitters of supranational norms in the process of Europeanising Ukraine, and thereby compensate for the lack of consensus on reforms amongst the political elites and the prevailing societal ambivalence.

However, given the scale of rent seeking amongst the political elites and the inefficiency, inertia, and corruption within the state bureaucracy that need to be overcome, the pro-European elite has to have sufficient influence to prevail over a whole array of group and individual interests. Its members have to become agents for change, that is, 'norm entrepreneurs to mobilise the domestic context and persuade others to redefine their interests and identities' (Borzel and Risse, 2000:15). All of this depends on the existence of an overarching consensus on the desirability of 'returning to Europe'. Undoubtedly, actors are more open to learning and persuasion, if the adoption of EU-defined (or at least approved) policy guidelines, although 'inconvenient', are nevertheless compatible with collectively shared understandings, meanings and identities. In other words, gaining EU membership has to be perceived as a priority and a public necessity at least at the elite level. Yet, as was argued above, Ukraine's Europeanness is couched, primarily, in terms of culture, history and geography; the degree of willingness to conform to its modern EU-defined emanations—criteria, standards, norms and institutions—remains questionable. Moreover, so far Ukraine's politics have been anything but conducive to consensus building and cost sharing and it remains to be seen if 'Europe' can help to imbue Ukrainian politics with these new qualities should new elites come to power.

In the case of the ECE countries, very few members of the elites had much idea of the full ramifications of submitting their applications for EU membership. In the case of Ukraine, however, not least due to Poland's pedagogical efforts to instruct its neighbour about the requirements of European integration (see Wolczuk and Wolczuk, 2002), some Ukrainian foreign policy makers have become increasingly aware of what conditionality actually means and the massive scale of domestic changes it requires. At the same time, given the passage of time since the collapse of communism, post-Soviet political and administrative structures, institutions and practices, have had longer to settle down, despite their continuous inefficiency. These two factors may make it more difficult for the EU's conditionality, if and when it is applied, to be acted on in Ukraine than in ECE.

The nature of the accession process presupposes a willingness to accommodate EU influences on domestic policy making. In an asymmetrical relationship, the EU has the license to involve itself in the domestic policy making of the state seeking membership and to unilaterally devise and utilise instruments for doing so. In meeting European standards the elites in the candidate states must act, more often than not, as transmitters of supra-nationally established norms (Bruszt and Stark, 2003:76). While the Ukrainian foreign policy makers are preoccupied with the prospect of membership for Ukraine, few of them fully realise the consequences of acquiring a European perspective. They tend to complain of not being treated as partners by the EU (author's interview with an MFA official, January 2003). This insistence on partnership by the Ukrainian officials may merely stem from the resentment of not being taken seriously (i.e. being denied the prospect of membership) by the EU. But it may also indicate that they have difficulties with the internalisation of EU-derived values, norms and standards associated with Europeanness, or, with accepting the sovereignty-diminishing cost associated with the accession into the EU. Increasingly, even for countries outside the EU, Europeanness signifies a readiness to accept norms, decisions and prescriptions, which are developed by the EU rather than domestically. So even though elite change may take place in Ukraine, the new elite's willingness to subject itself to the EU's conditionality remains untested.

19 See footnote 2.

4.2 Exogenous Factors

The coming to power of a new set of elites and their commitment to ‘Europe’ is a necessary but not sufficient condition for Europeanisation; exogenous factors also have a role to play in two key regards. First, the EU can play a role in bringing elite change about, and, second and more importantly, it can offer incentives for Ukraine to accept EU conditionality.

Without doubt, the EU can help propel new elites to power. In particular, both enlargement decisions and offers of prospects of membership can become tools for influencing the domestic balance of forces. The mere prospect of ‘entering Europe’ can lead to a redistribution of resources and differential empowerment at the domestic level. In other words ‘Europe’, or more precisely, the conditions of entry, become a resource during the shift of power (‘Report on Political Dimensions of the Accession Criteria’, 2002). The elite, propelled to power by external actors, are more likely to internalise, identify with, and promote new rules and norms supported by those actors. In the cases of Slovakia and Serbia, the EU went as far as demanding not only the proper conduct of elections (procedural standards), but made the progress of integration of those countries with the EU conditional upon the substantive outcome, that is on who got elected. In the case of Ukraine the EU has refrained from utilising this instrument beyond an insistence that it was important how elections were conducted (i.e. ‘free and fair’) rather than the substantive outcome, despite the distaste for the current power elite on the international arena. Nevertheless, the EU as one of the external watchdogs (alongside other international organizations such as the Council of Europe and OSCE) may help to prevent the playing field from being tilted too much in favour of the dominant elite, something which may suffice for change of power given the mood for change amongst the electorate (see above). While pursuing the heavy handed tactics in the electoral contest, the power elite has been trying to avoid isolation on the international arena, akin to that experienced by president of Belarus, Aleksander Lukashenka.

The second condition—the EU’s active role in offering motivational leverage—is indispensable, however. The prolonged crisis-like situation in Ukraine may facilitate the domestic adaptation to ‘Europe’ although the elite is unlikely to adopt Europeanising policies without a clear signal that Ukraine’s is welcome in Europe. The prospect of membership also provides a powerful symbolic tool enabling the elites to embark on political and economic reforms. As Grabbe has pointed out, the EU’s actual influence on any given policy area in ECE is often exaggerated because both the EU and ECE policy makers have a vested interest in doing so. Nevertheless, across ECE, reforms have been legitimised by the imperative of European integration (Grabbe, 2003:310. See also ‘Report in the Impact of the Accession Criteria: Public Administration and Judiciaries’, 2003). Therefore, in order to facilitate the acceptance by Ukraine of the EU’s agenda setting through conditionality, Ukraine’s membership of the EU—however long-term—would have to be perceived as a real prospect. Only this would legitimise the use of the substantive leverage—the monitoring of compliance with the EU’s conditionality. Given the scale of necessary reforms in Ukraine, only high adaptational pressure from outside, which is then internalised and acted on by the domestic elites, is likely to result in Europeanisation, that is the adoption of rules and norms defined at the European level in domestic policy making.

However, more than the mere prospect of membership for Ukraine is necessary for accelerating the domestic transformation of Ukraine ‘in the name of Europe’. In ECE the EU supplied ‘normative targets’ well before it had set out any membership requirements or even agreed to expansion. But only some governments responded to these targets (for example, Poland and Hungary did but Slovakia and Romania did not). In the case of reform-minded governments the EU’s symbolic leverage reinforced the reform agenda, but failed to avert rent-seeking behaviour in non-compliant cases. Had the EU remained passive, some scholars argue that the democratisation in the latter countries would have been endangered. It was only when the ‘active leverage’ of the pre-accession conditionality was applied, that the prospect of EU membership affected the course of political change in Slovakia and, to a lesser extent, Romania (see Vachudova, 2001). This principle could clearly be extended to Ukraine. The much-sought ‘positive message’ regarding membership prospects would provide only limited

symbolic leverage. Furthermore, the EU would not only have to offer an incentive but be prepared to use a 'stick', for example, by stalling further integration for non-compliance with EU conditionality.

4.3 The EU Policy towards Ukraine and Prospects for Europeanisation

Having outlined the exogenous conditions, to what extent then does the EU's policy towards Ukraine meet these conditions?

According to the March 2003 New Neighbourhood Initiative which evolved into the new European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) by May 2004, the EU's approach to its Eastern neighbours, including Ukraine, consists of supporting stability, but without incurring the costs—both political and financial—of extending institutions and core policies to the Wider Europe (Gould, 2003:2). The strategy proposed by the European Commission centres on offering the so-called new neighbourhood a stake in the EU's internal market, through step-by-step integration, subject to extensive benchmarking. This amounts to an offer of creating something resembling the European Economic Area (that is the means by which three of the European Free Trade Association countries, namely Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, participate in the EU's internal market and other policies). The ENP is to be separate from the accession process. By providing a generous, even if vague, offer of prospective inclusion in the single market to the so-called new neighbours, the leaders of the EU hope to lower the barriers with European non-members and entice them into accepting EU conditionality, but without the risk of jeopardising deeper integration between the members of the enlarged EU.

In light of the aforementioned sources of pro-European orientation in Ukraine, how motivating is the prospect of a stake in the internal market? There are a number of reasons why the focus on the economic benefits of integration under the auspices of the ENP may not go far enough in stimulating far-reaching reforms in Ukraine.

First, in order to mobilise domestic support for reforms, for Ukraine 'Europe' must become, above all, a political—and not merely economic—project. The focus on the largely technocratic aspects of integration in order to extract economic benefits from integration would not enable the pro-reforms elites to embark on much needed reforms in the name of 'entering Europe'. In the process of accession to the EU, the political and economic transformation has become equated with preparation for membership. Political elites in the accession countries assumed the role of transmitters of supranational norms. However, it is unlikely that the pursuit of the free trade area in the short term, and inclusion in the EU's single market in the long-term, could sway the Ukrainian elite and society and thereby overcome domestic barriers to reforms, including the lack of consensus amongst the political elites and the prevailing societal ambivalence in Ukraine.

Second, the balance of costs and benefits for Ukraine is less attractive than for the countries with a membership prospect, however distant. The EU's strategy relies on the appeal of economic benefits, which accrue from access to the EU market. However, because this access depends on compliance with the rules and standards of the internal market, the EU proposes that the countries in the so-called New Neighbourhood adopt significant parts of the *acquis* related to the internal market. So far access to the internal market has been used by the EU to deepen economic cooperation between developed market economies, which chose to eschew EU membership, but were willing to adopt the *acquis* to gain access to this market. In the case of Ukraine, this 'offer' presents a massive challenge. This is not only because of entrenched business interests and the lack of the legislative and administrative capacity to enact the *acquis*, but also because of the sheer costs involved.²⁰ The ECE candidate states have largely met the costs in anticipation of the benefits associated with membership.²¹ However, the balance of costs and benefits is

20 Not only would the state have to provide a level playing field for economic agents (at the moment, market entry and exit in Ukraine often depends more on access to political decision-making than the availability of capital and entrepreneurship), but it would also have to make costly adjustments.

21 There is the question over whether the *acquis* pertaining to the common market is suitable for a weak state and economy like Ukraine. Given the distinct vacuum of policy ideas in Ukraine, the *acquis*' attractiveness stems from it being

less attractive to poorer and weaker states, like Ukraine, when only access to the internal market, rather than EU membership (however distant), is on offer (Gould, 2003). The PCA already envisages the creation of a free trade area between the EU and Ukraine. Incentives for economic integration may become stronger as the reform process gains momentum, but in the short term, the appeal of this incentive is limited to business sectors with a current interest in access to the EU market, and, as such, is unlikely to widen the appeal of 'Europe' beyond sections of the bureaucracy and business.

Amongst specialists on the subject, there is much scepticism about the ability of external actors to tip the scales in favour of reforms by using conditionality to change elite behaviour. But with regard to the role of the EU, their scepticism is unfounded. Because of the high pay-off from membership, the traction of the EU is so considerable that it can indeed affect the pattern of political change in non-member states (Vachudova, 2003:4-5). However, for a weak economy, access to the EU market alone carries a lower pay-off, and as such weakens the draw of the EU.

Given the already formulated objective in Ukraine's relations with the EU, the appeal to domestic actors of to aspire to 'European standards' as defined by the EU largely depends on the perception of feasibility of membership. By repeated declarations, Ukrainian leadership has turned the prospect of membership into a real litmus test of EU's genuine commitment to Ukraine, and thereby vastly restricted the mobilising potential of any alternative arrangements. The incentive of the prospective inclusion in the internal market, even though generous from the EU's point of view, falls short of the expectations of the Ukrainian elites, because they seek to emulate the integration path of the ECE new members.

Third, the ENP does not give the EU sufficient leverage over the countries it seeks to influence. The Policy does not justify and legitimise the exposing of the country to the EU's rule-setting agenda to the same extent as in the ECE states prior to their accession, even though the EU aspires to extend its use of conditionality to its new eastern neighbours. The asymmetrical relationship of a candidate state vis-à-vis the EU conferred on the latter influence on domestic policy making. The desire for membership has provided a stronger incentive for the states aspiring to membership than for (some of) the existing member states to implement EU policies, even though the applicant states could not influence decision making in the EU. It is doubtful whether the EU could acquire comparable influence on domestic policy making in its eastern neighbours under the ENP, given the domestic obstacles to reforms and the fixation with the prospect of membership in Ukraine.

During the preparation of an Action Plan (AP)—the main instrument of the EU's new European Neighbourhood Policy in the short-term—EU officials pointed out that the AP lists a set of conditions that Ukraine would have to comply with anyway if it is serious about acquiring a membership perspective. In other words, the required changes in Ukraine are fully compatible with Ukraine's desire to join the EU. However, it is unlikely that the adoption of the AP will establish the EU as a political actor in Ukraine.

Given the domestic configuration of factors, the difficulty that the EU faces when it comes to influencing countries such as Ukraine is that, on the one hand, the lack of a membership prospect seriously hampers the stimulating potential of 'entering Europe' in the domestic context, and, on the other, the mere prospect of membership, even though a necessary condition, is not sufficient to ensure the Europeanisation of Ukraine.

Conclusion

The Ukrainian political elites remains the key driving force for EU membership. Society remains simultaneously divided and ambivalent about foreign policy in general; and although it is largely supportive of Ukraine's EU's membership, the elites do not face societal pressure for pursuing this particular foreign policy option. Even though the elites seem much more unified in their support for integration into the EU, they differ in terms of their motivation to seek closer ties with the EU. For the

(Contd.) _____

perceived as a ready made set of policy prescriptions in the absence of effective domestic policy making. But the suitability of the common market *acquis* to act as a template for post-communist reforms has been questioned. (See Grabbe, 2003).

key political force in Ukraine during Kuchma's second presidency, namely the pro-presidential elite who controls the executive agencies of the state, the costs of pursuing European integration have been too high. As political and economic reforms required for closer integration with the EU would jeopardise their group and personal interests, the dominant elite has limited itself to declarations in the external fora and limited, formalistic enactment of the 'European choice' in the domestic context. That the elite still proclaims aspirations to join the Union, despite renegeing on the related commitment to domestic reforms, can be explained by the fact that the 'European choice' serves as a declarative resource both for domestic politics and foreign policy. At the same time, while demanding a prospect of membership, Ukraine's leadership eschews any effective commitments associated with seeking membership of the EU on the grounds that no positive signal has been received on the issue from Brussels. Kuchma summed up this view by pointing out that 'nobody awaits us in Europe'. This assertion seemingly absolved the elite of the need to prove their 'European credentials' by enacting EU's 'normative targets'. At the same time, however, the pro-reform elites have been also seeking the prospect of membership on the grounds that even though the country will not be able to join the EU for many years to come, the acknowledgement of this possibility by the EU would only strengthen their case in Ukraine for the unequivocal choice of the 'European path' and weaken the appeal of the 'Eastern option', the pursuit of which is not conditional on domestic reforms in Ukraine.

To this end, in terms of the prospect of Europeanisation, Ukraine represents a 'difficult' case insofar as its pro-European stance is coupled with stuttering domestic transformation. Therefore, while the search for closer ties with European institutions is unlikely to abate in Ukraine, no political actors in Ukraine have been strong and/or sufficiently committed to implementing the reforms necessary to move the country closer to 'European standards'. While the benefits of participation in European integration are not lost on the Ukrainian elites at large, seeking European integration through foreign policy instruments has not actually entailed Europeanisation.

As evidenced by the experience of the ECE accession countries, a number of conditions have to be met before a country embarks on domestic restructuring in the name of 'Europe'. With prospects for elite change in Ukraine unclear (as of summer 2004) and the EU stance on Ukraine equivocal, the answer to the question of whether the 'European choice' will remain merely a declarative, legitimising resource or whether it will actually inspire the reform process in Ukraine leading to an improvement of standards of public life and economic well-being remains unanswerable at present.

Ukraine was one of the primary candidates to benefit from the Wider Europe initiative when it was launched in 2003, and which subsequently evolved into the European Neighbourhood Policy. However, the ENP in its current format is unlikely to entail Europeanisation in Ukraine. If any systemic reforms are pursued, it will be regardless, rather than because of, the ENP. However, the post-enlargement phase of European integration when more post-communist countries become immediate neighbours of the enlarged EU merits a continuous close examination of the sources of pro-European policies and dynamics of, and prospects for, Europeanisation in non-EU Europe.

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