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UKRAINE'S MULTI-VECTORIAL FOREIGN POLICY: LOOKING WEST WHILE NOT OVERLOOKING ITS EASTERN NEIGHBOR

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Abstract:

Post-Soviet Ukraine has since the regaining of statehood in 1991 pursued an independent course, though its location conditioned to a great extent the contours of its foreign policy. In fact, whereas rapprochement with the West is very much valued, relations with Russia remain a central pillar in the Ukrainian construct. Thus, looking West while not overlooking its Eastern neighbor. In this context, how might Ukrainian authorities conciliate these different vectors in the country's foreign policy? To which extent might the Orange Revolution principles strive in a difficult internal setting and complex external context? How far might Western influence and Russian interference affect Kiev's foreign policy options? In searching answers to these questions, this paper aims at deconstructing the various circles in Kiev's multi-vectorial foreign policy addressing the country's foreign policy in an integrated way, where internal formulations condition and are conditioned by external options, shedding light over how these inter-linkages and inter-connections play in Ukrainian policy making and chosen path.

Keywords: Ukraine, Multi-Vectorial Foreign Policy, West, East.

Resumen:

La Ucrania post-soviética ha perseguido un curso independiente en su política exterior desde que lograra la independencia en 1991. Sin embargo su posición geográfica condicionó mucho el contorno de su política exterior. De hecho, mientras que un acercamiento al Oeste ha sido valorado grandemente, las relaciones con Rusia han seguido siendo el pilar central de Ucrania, intentándose por tanto, mirar hacia el Oeste sin perder de vista a su vecino oriental. En tal contexto, ¿cómo podrían conciliar las autoridades ucranianas los diferentes vectores de la política exterior de su país? ¿En qué medida podrían pervivir los principios de la Revolución Naranja entre un contexto interior tan difícil y un contexto exterior complejo? ¿En qué medida pueden afectar a las opciones en política exterior de Kiev la influencia occidental y las interferencias rusas? Intentando encontrar respuestas a tales preguntas, este artículo tiene como objetivo la deconstrucción de los varios círculos en la política exterior multi-vectorial de Kiev que se encargan de atender a la política exterior de una manera integrada y donde las formulaciones interiores se ven condicionadas por las opciones externas, echando luz de esta manera sobre cómo las interrelaciones e interconexiones se desarrollan en el proceso de toma de decisiones y en el curso elegido.

Palabras clave: Ucrania, Política Exterior Multi-Vectorial, Oeste, Este.

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1. Introduction

The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet bloc have led to a redrawing of the geostrategic map in the East, with the emergence of new independent states demanding a new ordering of the old Soviet space. The Russian Federation, reduced in its status, dimension and power, has sought in this context of change to keep its influence and perpetuate the memories of a past already gone. However, the new independent republics have followed differentiated courses, more proximate or distant to the old empire. Ukraine, the birthplace of the Russian nation and its natural ally, kept since the regaining of independence an ambivalent foreign policy, multi-vectorial in orientation, where it has become notorious its wish of approximation to the West,² while keeping close ties with Moscow. A policy orientation that amidst resistance and complementarity has directed Kiev's foreign policy after 1991.

If Ukraine's regaining of independence in August 1991 has meant an affirmation of national identity, renewing expectations regarding governing practices distanced from the Soviet model, the Orange Revolution in 2004 represented the culmination of a series of disillusionments and the demand for structural changes in the conduct of the country's policies. From 1991 Ukraine was governed under a semi-authoritarian presidential regime by Leonid Kravchuk (1991-1994) and Leonid Kuchma (1994-2004). The long "reign" of Kuchma, supported by a hierarchical structure of power with well defined contours, allowed the consolidation of oligarchic groups with economic strength and power of influence over decision making, a situation that was not unique in the former Soviet space. However, and contrary to other post-Soviet regimes with a strong centralized and authoritarian dimension, the Kuchma leadership allowed some room for maneuver to opposition forces and to the mobilization of civil society.

After the Orange Revolution, Viktor Yushchenko raised to the presidency reaffirming these same commitments, though with a clearly pro-Western program. This multi-vector policy has however been understood differently in Western circles and in Moscow, raising questions about its reliability in a constant game of engagement and disengagement in order to conciliate interests with policies, while avoiding unnecessary friction. And in fact, while rapprochement with the West is very much valued, relations with Russia remain a central pillar in the Ukrainian construct. Thus, looking West while not overlooking its Eastern neighbor.

In this context, how might Ukrainian authorities conciliate these different vectors in the country's foreign policy? To which extent might the Orange Revolution principles strive in a difficult internal setting and complex external context? How far might Western influence and Russian interference affect and have effect in Kiev's foreign policy options? In searching answers to these questions, this paper aims are threefold: to deconstruct the various circles in Kiev's multi-vectorial foreign policy addressing the country's foreign policy in an integrated way, where internal formulations condition and are conditioned by external options; to identify internal constraints to foreign policy, with the role of civil society gaining prominence, and demonstrating how despite keeping an high profile level in domestic terms, foreign policy is not immune to popular support/discontent; and to shed light over how these

² The term "West" is used in a broad manner, referring throughout to the Euro-Atlantic dimension, this is, the European Union, NATO and the United States.



inter-linkages and inter-connections play in Ukrainian policy making and chosen path, by adding the mix of power and perceptions to the foreign policy equation.

2. Shaping foreign policy: the agency/structure debate and the internal/external links

Domestic and external factors combine in foreign policy formulation, resulting in a formula where internal capacities, resources and political will plus external threats and opportunities lead to multi-various policy options, where the end result underlines the search for a maximization of gains. These gains are the result of the definition of the national interest, as the guiding basis for the pursuit of national objectives.³ As such, the internal/external relationship is asymmetrically bi-directional. This means that these two dimensions are closely interconnected, though with differentiated weights. The national interest, identity and perceptions rise above external dynamics, in the sense that states confer primacy to national goals, in the formulation of foreign policy, but are not immune to both domestic and external dynamics that hinder or foster the pursuit of these.⁴

This process of interaction might be framed in the broader agent/structure debate, further reinforcing its intertwinings, by including this duality both at the internal and external levels. In other words, at the external level we have reciprocal interactions between the international system and states, while internally we have these same reciprocal relations between the domestic political structure and its units, including bureaucracies and civil society. The constant fluxes taking place within and between the agent/structure relations, as processes of interaction leading to more or less cooperation, are the focus of analysis. So, this understanding implies the assumption that agent/structure and internal/external, as cross-cutting dimensions of analysis are not dissociable regarding the process of formulation and decision in foreign policy.

In this complex formula, different variables at different levels (external versus internal), crossing multiple sectors and issue-areas (politics, security, economics, culture), and sparkled by normative and perceptions-based elements define the equation. Issues of preference, identity and perception are thus added to power considerations, complementing the theoretical approach followed here. The image of the self and of the other, as formulated in a Constructivist line, are fundamental in defining internal and external options,⁵ and have

³ The relevance of the internal/external relationship in foreign policy making has been widely acknowledged in the literature. See Rosenau, James (2006): "Pre-theories and Theories of Foreign Policy", in Rosenau, James: *The Study of World Politics: Theoretical and Methodological Challenges*, Vol. 1, London; New York, Routledge. Reprint of the article originally published in Farrell, R. Barry (ed.) (1966): *Approaches to Comparative and International Politics*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press; Katzenstein, Peter: "International Relations and Domestic Structures: Foreign Economic Policies of Advanced Industrial States", *International Organization*, No. 52 (1976), pp. 919-941; Hill, Christopher (2003): *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan; Saideman, Stephen and Ayres, R. William: "Pie Crust Promises and the Sources of Foreign Policy: The Limited Impact of Accession and the Priority of Domestic Constituencies", *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2007), pp. 189-210; Alons, Gerry: "Predicting a State's Foreign Policy: States Preferences between Domestic and International Constraints", *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 3, no. 3, (2007), pp. 211-232.

⁴ See for example Saideman and Ayres, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

⁵ Roxanna, Sjöstedt: "The Discursive Origins of a Doctrine: Norms, Identity, and Securitization under Harry S. Truman and George W. Bush", *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2007), p. 238; Houghton, David: "Reinvigorating the Study of Foreign Policy Decision Making: Toward a Constructivist Approach", *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2007), pp. 42-43; Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 9.



impact on the agent/structure relationship by mingling perceptions and power in the equation of choices. Not exclusive, this exercise helps in explaining the multitude of aspects underlining foreign policy making, beyond the traditional models rooted in rational choice, bureaucratic politics, or the role of leadership in agenda-setting and policy-making.⁶ And goes beyond the “labels and models that direct us toward a particular slice of reality”,⁷ allowing a comprehensive analysis of dynamics and trends.

From the particular case of Ukraine it becomes clear the inter-linkage between these different levels and ingredients, where a mix of factors should be considered for the understanding of foreign policy. Although formulated at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the recipe is enriched by these various aspects that intermingle in the final product. The internal and the external are both catalysts for change and obstacle to progress. On the former, the domestic reform course and its expression in meeting the criteria for accession to international organizations, along with accountability to the population, and the expectations implied are example; on the latter, hindrance to progress has been revealed by the political squeamishness of forces in power and the constant balancing between East and West, meaning at times an unbalanced course. And in this connection, a multitude of sectors, issue-areas and perceptions complete the analysis.

Questions about national identity along with perceptions about Ukraine’s capabilities and regarding its neighborhood, both to the East and to the West underline the country’s foreign policy. Defining and affirming its national identity after years of Soviet ruling and a past of imperial occupation, in a context of transition, is not easy. A rejection of the past is not sufficient. The Ukrainian construct, in a post-communist transition setting, must be built over a collective identification with a shared identity. Ukraine sees itself as an in-between territory that has a role as a bridge-builder between East and West. It perceives itself as belonging to a wider Europe (the Westernizers), where Russia is included, with historical links to Slavic Russia (the Slavophiles). It is both a European and a Slavic state.⁸ And it is in the sequence of this reasoning that Kiev defines its multi-vectorial foreign policy. Regarding perceptions of its proximate neighborhood, simplified here in the EU to the West, and Russia to the East. Russia is understood simultaneously as a threat and a necessary partner. The EU, besides being a strategic partner is also the demanding neighbor.

Thus, foreign policy choice and formulation has been a process still unclear in a country still looking for its own place, as revealed in unstable domestic dealings and not always clear foreign intentions. Also underlining the transition process is the conjugation of perceptions at home and abroad: (mis)perceptions to the East and West are fundamental in the policy alignments, bargaining strength and in the relation between internal and external inputs/outputs. This duality resulting from its status as an “in-between” country does not mean, however, that the Eastern and the Western are mutually exclusive options in the Ukrainian agenda. In fact, this is not so much a question of choice, but of how to deal with these sometimes ambivalent policy courses in a consistent manner, promoting Ukraine’s national interests and projecting the country in the international setting.

⁶ Richard C Snyder; H W Bruck; Burton M Sapin; Valerie M Hudson; Derek H Chollet and James M Goldgeier (2002): *Foreign Policy Decision-Making Revisited*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan.

⁷ Nau, Henry: “Why We Fight over Foreign Policy”, *Policy Review*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2007), p. 26.

⁸ See Dergachev, Aleksandr: “Ukrainian-Russian Relations: European and Eurasian Contexts”, *Russian Politics and Law*, Vol. 39, No. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 2000), p. 57; Miller, Eric: “The Changing Face of Eurasia: Russian and Ukrainian Foreign Policy in Transition”, *Comparative Strategy*, Book Review, no. 22 (2003), pp. 383; Copey, Nathaniel: “Popular Politics and the Ukrainian Presidential Election of 2004”, *Politics*, vol. 25, no. 2, (2005), pp. 99-106.



3. (In)consistences in Ukrainian politics

The Orange Revolution, meaning change and hope,⁹ symbolized the rejection of Leonid Kuchma's authoritarian policies, allowing the voicing of democratic-oriented policies and options. Internally demonstrating a desire for change, the protests should not be unframed from the international context where reminiscence of the East/West dichotomy is recovered from time to time. The presidential elections of 2004, very much disputed and stage of controversy, besides the difficulties associated to post-communist transition, showed the ambivalence inherent to the formulation of external policy and its implications in Ukraine, revealing also the transversal character of internal and external dynamics to the foreign policy process. In a simplified manner, the crisis ended up being equated with a dispute between a Ukraine turning West under the leadership of Viktor Yushchenko, and a Ukraine looking on the opposite direction, with Viktor Yanukovych. This labeling, independently of the political programs, was reinforced by the national and international media and by the involvement of foreign governments. This resulted in mutual criticism involving Putin's acclamation of support to Yanukovych and regarding Western political and financial support to Yushchenko's campaign.¹⁰ The West accused the Kremlin of direct interference in political and economic terms; while Putin criticized the Western involvement in Ukraine as an attempt to isolate Russia,¹¹ an interpretation of the events as a worrying example of the Western tendency for meddling in the former Soviet space, searching to "manufacture democracy".¹²

But despite these conflicting dynamics, the orange wave that swept across the country in that cold winter of 2004, bringing with it winds of change, proved its strength with Viktor Yushchenko's becoming the new president of a new Ukraine. The euphoria felt in the streets rested on the desire of approximation to the West and the liberal democratic model, understood as a new phase in the country's history. It meant a decisive step away from the Soviet past, in an affirmation of a differentiated course. Despite Kravchuk's and especially Kuchma's statements regarding the need for cooperative relations with the West, in a post-cold war order, the old Soviet style still imprinted in Kuchma's policies, along with a strong loyalty to the Kremlin, were not convincing enough both at home and externally. So, it might be argued that Ukraine's revolution came about as an affirmation by the negative of a new policy orientation, underlined by a rejection of Soviet reminiscence.

In fact, if for some time Kuchma managed to play with the country's geopolitical and strategic location, pressuring both the West and Russia and seeking recognition as a bridging state, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States changed the scenario. The post-9/11 setting allowed a closer relationship between Russia and the West, preventing Ukraine from playing its card as the in-between power. In addition, by the end of 2002, cooperation between Kiev and Washington suffered substantially with the public release of tapes containing information about corruption and other criminal acts involving President Kuchma and his close collaborators. A former responsible for security, Mykola Melnychenko released tapes containing information about an alleged sale of military equipment to Iraq,

⁹ Stepanenko, Viktor: "How Ukrainians view their Orange Revolution: Public Opinion and the National Peculiarities of Citizenry Political Activities", *Demokratyzatsiya*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2005), p. 614.

¹⁰ "Russia: EU Commissioner criticizes Moscow's 'assertive' policy toward neighboring states", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)*, 26 January 2005.

¹¹ "Russia: Putin defends reforms, condemns 'revolutions'", *RFE/RL*, 23 December 2004.

¹² Herd, Graeme P.: "Colorful Revolutions and the CIS: 'Manufactured' versus 'Managed Democracy'", *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 52, no. 2 (2005), p. 4.



questioning Ukraine's status as a partner of confidence. As a direct consequence of the arms scandal, also known as the Kolchuga affair due to the technology involved, President Kuchma was disinvited from attending the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit in 2002, where he nevertheless showed up. For the first time in the history of the organization, the seats were organized according to the French alphabet so that Ukraine and the United States did not sit side-by-side. Moreover, the traditional Ukraine-United States annual summit did not take place. These events caused consternation and put on hold the announced intention of Ukraine to join NATO and the European Union.

As a way of minimizing these damages, in the summer of 2003 Ukraine sent to Iraq a 1600-person military force, a gesture welcomed in Washington, which promised support to Ukraine's internal reform effort (the last troops returned home in December 2005). The Orange Revolution in December 2004 consolidated rapprochement. The Western look seemed to both lead again the country's politics and to have been refocused on Ukraine. And as a sign of this shift taking place in Ukrainian politics, the first political measures of the newly elected President, Viktor Yushchenko, related to the need of regaining Western trust. However, the Western approach was cautious from the very beginning in order not to question cooperation with Russia. The fight against corruption and other illicit practices was announced as a priority goal, seeking to promote trust in the judicial apparatus, while demonstrating the country's democratic option.

"The course and the results of the Orange Revolution have strengthened the constitutional system and a state based on law. (...) when viewed against the backdrop of history of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, it should rather be called an antirevolution, which overcame the old ideas of what a revolution must be".¹³ The concept of revolution implies a deep change in the politics of a country. And, in a certain way, it was what happened in Ukraine with the retirement of Leonid Kuchma from the presidency and the consequent nullification of a series of undemocratic practices and politics. However, it was a revolution that ended up involving little institutional changes, and not always in the direction of more democratization, transparency and openness. "There remains a great deal to do in terms of political reform, and the process could easily grind to a halt. (...) The institutional basis for liberal democracy in Ukraine is still incomplete. Therefore the dramatic events of late 2004 should be seen as having opened up the possibility for revolutionary change but not, by themselves, completing the revolution".¹⁴ Thus, only if the spirit of the revolution is extended to the political decision making system, might the process of change be consolidated.

It is also curious to note that the old regime almost disappeared from the political landscape, what for many Western observers has been described as an absence of an institutional democratic system.¹⁵ The coalition that united to replace Leonid Kuchma in power was united for that same reason, to replace Kuchma, not meaning easy agreement within the coalition regarding an alignment of politics – which will be reflected clearly in the events associated to the legislative elections of 2006 and later on, 2007. It becomes therefore clear that the way in which Yushchenko implements his political project and his capacity of collaboration with the government are essential in a political system where presidential power was diminished in favor of the executive, as a way of avoiding the return of hyper-

¹³ Simon, Gerhard: "An Orange-Tinged Revolution: The Ukrainian Path to Democracy", *Russian Politics and Law*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2006), p. 17.

¹⁴ D'Anieri, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

¹⁵ Simon, *op. cit.*, p. 25.



presidentialism common to the Soviet governing practice. These moves restraining presidential power have also been used as a means to avoid interference in the government's daily running of the country.¹⁶ But its articulation in concrete terms will be revealing of the reach of change, and so far this has not been encouraging. It seems that "the danger in the short term is not authoritarianism but stalemate".¹⁷ And once more, the way in which internal politics have been conducted and the constant governing instability might reveal an obstacle to the process of democratic consolidation (the relationship between the domestic political structure with its units, including bureaucracies, but also civil society), with consequences for the country's external relations.

Internally, politics are changing and closeness to the West has been repeatedly voiced, with Kiev stressing the wish of integration in the EU and NATO. The government led by Yulia Tymoshenko, in power between January and September 2005, rendered democratic promotion and the fight against corruption and illicit practices a priority, given the existing arbitrariness and restrictions to fundamental rights and freedoms. Ironically, one of the main banners of the Tymoshenko government was also one of the main causes of its failure: corruption together with internal dispute undermined governing cohesion.

The new government led by Yuriy Yekhanurov followed these main guidelines regarding a pragmatic posture in economic development and political consolidation. Regarding foreign policy, the new prime minister revealed caution, avoiding unnecessary friction: while approximation to the West is valued, relations with Russia remain a fundamental pillar in the Ukrainian construct. So, Ukraine emerges as a country turned Westwards but that does not overlook its Eastern neighbor. The multi-vectorial foreign policy has been following the motto: "To Europe with Russia", apparently trying to reconcile the Eastern and Western vectors in Ukrainian external relations. The goals are clear: "the priorities will be the same – that is European and Euro-Atlantic integration, meaning EU, NATO. Certainly we will continue to pay adequate attention to our neighbors and, among neighbors to strategic partners, that is Russia and Poland, and certainly the US".¹⁸

But the effort to act in concert in foreign affairs has been constrained by unstable politics at home. The legislative elections on 26 March 2006 resulted in the victory of the Party of Regions, without parliamentary majority, implying the need for negotiating a coalition government. This victory of the opposition shows popular disenchantment with the unfulfilled promises of the Orange Revolution. More than a year after, economic growth did not reach the expected levels, corruption was maintained as a factor of high governing instability, and the social conditions of the population suffered only residual changes well below the expectations. The dream about a democratic and prosperous Ukraine dissipated in the complex post-communist transition. A long-term process demanding the implementation of reforms in a short period and giving signs of consolidation only in the long run. Thus, expectations revealed largely distant from the real possibilities, giving an imprint of disillusionment and failure to a mixed record of advances and many obstacles.

The election results in March 2006 meant that the Party of Yanukovych would need to form a coalition with one of the parties of the Orange Revolution, anticipating a period of governing instability. And in fact the incapacity to form government prolonged for about six months with the domestic and external consequences that this institutional paralysis implied

¹⁶ "Law reducing Ukrainian President's powers comes into force", *RFE/RL*, 2 February 2007.

¹⁷ D'Anieri, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

¹⁸ Tarasiuk, Borys: Ukrainian Minister for Foreign Affairs cited in Krusshenycky, Askold, "Ukraine: interview with Borys Tarasiuk, Yushchenko's Foreign Policy Adviser", *RFE/RL*, 30 December 2004.



for the country. In July 2006,¹⁹ after difficult negotiations, a new coalition led by Yanukovych was formed, an “anti-crisis” coalition between the Party of Regions, the Socialist Party (Moroz stepped aside from the Orange Coalition and joined his political rivals), and the Communist Party. President Yushchenko had 15 days to consider the nomination of Yanukovych as Prime Minister and send it to Parliament.

However, the President considered the new pro-Russian coalition unconstitutional on 13 July, leading to popular demonstrations, this time in support of Yanukovych. On 18 July, the Constitutional Court gave its consent to the anti-crisis coalition, with the Our Ukraine bloc becoming a minority in Parliament. On 3 August, the President announced his decision to formally nominate Yanukovych as Prime Minister, after agreement on a National Unity Declaration²⁰ was reached. The document aimed at guaranteeing the Ukrainian course to greater integration in Europe and assuring the path of reforms towards a market economy. In 27 articles, the document shows, through a listing of consensus, democratic lines in its formulations. It calls for institutional reform, the fight against corruption, and structural reforms in the economy, as necessary steps for the economic, political and institutional consolidation of the country. This call involves an effort of integration into the EU, pressing for the beginning of negotiations regarding a free trade area between Ukraine and the EU, and by the implementation of the needed reforms for Ukraine to join the World Trade Organization. Moreover, it has been agreed that relations with NATO should comply with national legislation in security matters, and that Ukraine’s accession to the organization will be subject to referendum.

On 4 August 2006, and after a period of much uncertainty in Ukrainian politics, Viktor Yanukovych became Prime Minister, immediately being congratulated on his new post by Russian President Putin.²¹ A shift that played both to the interest of Ukraine and revealed a tricky nature, by implying privileged relations with Moscow, but also a retreat in the solidification of statehood, with the bargaining between concessions and demands in the relationship with the Kremlin eventually leading to further Ukrainian dependence on its neighbor. However, Yanukovych has immediately noticed the relevance of the European vector in the country’s foreign policy, showing his intention not to simply bow before Russia.

The political relationship of Yushchenko and Yanukovych ended up reflecting all these misunderstandings with Ukraine plunged again in the lines of political instability. The recapping of accusations about abuse of power and corruption further added to tension. In the spring of 2007, President Yushchenko issued a decree calling for early elections. The decree generated much animosity among the opposition and protests were again on the daily agenda of the country. After retreating from this move, declared as unconstitutional, Yushchenko reissued a decree on the same lines in June, reinforced by a later one dated of August, and early elections were scheduled. Members of parliament from the opposition gave up their mandates in open protest and the national parliament functioned in an amorphous way – nothing new in a country where political-institutional stability has been absent. Legislative elections finally took place on 30 September 2007, very contested and with results giving a slim majority to a renegotiated and renewed “orange coalition”. However, and despite the return of Yulia Tymoshenko as head of government (she was confirmed on the post on 18

¹⁹ “There will be no repeat elections. It is a too expensive pleasure for the country and an inadequate price for the ambitions of some politicians”, in “Ukraine: Has Socialist Leader Dealt Fatal Blow to Orange Coalition?”, *RFE/RL*, 7 July 2006.

²⁰ Declaration of National Unity, Text signed at the Round Table, Kiev, 3 August 2006.

²¹ “Putin congratulates Yushchenko on ending stalemate”, *RFE/RL*, 7 August 2006.



December 2007), the prospects for institutional and political stability in Ukraine were not bright.

Disagreement within the coalition persisted, and this time the room for maneuver was meager, with comments like “the coalition’s majority is so thin that even the bouts of flu that regularly disable Ukrainian lawmakers could disrupt the balance of power in the legislature” demonstrating how fragile was the context for the new government’s ruling.²² The new prime minister stated democratization as an internal priority, with a first sign translated in the government’s approval of the document “Ukrainian breakthrough: for people but not for politicians”, which intended to incarnate the ideals of the 2004 revolution and make the governing authorities more accountable to civil society. A new focus which aimed at rendering explicit a shift in Ukrainian politics, with the relevance of popular support understood in-between the lines as fundamental for overall stability.

Externally, Tymoshenko pledged to “harmonise relations with Moscow”²³ and reinforced the idea that “the course of Ukraine to the Euro-Atlantic integration is not an alternative to building relations with the Russian Federation”, at a time when the rise in tension was noticeable, with Ukraine playing its Western card, by officially demonstrating its intention to join NATO’s Membership Action Plan; and welcoming agreement between EU states on the Lisbon Treaty, along with the wording of the text, which “acknowledges a right of every European country, which shares EU values, to apply for EU membership”.²⁴ Moves not welcomed in Moscow which tightened economic and political pressure. And a sign that Russia still plays with the image of NATO as the enemy, understanding the Alliance’s further enlargement closer towards its borders as a direct threat to its security.

And the frailty that embedded the coalition led again to political instability, from November 2008, on the grounds of economics pitfalls. President Yushenko dissolved parliament and called for early elections on December 7, a call that was later suspended (otherwise this would be the third time after the Orange Revolution in 2004 that Ukrainians would go to the polls). Agreement over a new governing coalition under the leadership of Tymoshenko emerged already in the context of the financial crisis that affected the international system particularly from fall 2008. In fact, it was part of the strong discourse on the stability needed internally for addressing the many challenges associated to the global problems it implies. The Prime Minister declared that she was “certain that the end of the political crisis gives us far greater hope that Ukraine will overcome all the challenges of the world financial crisis without turbulence”.²⁵ More comprehensive, the “anti crisis” coalition seems to reproduce better the Orange Revolution ideals than the previous political exercises, though not meaning it will work better in such a volatile domestic political context as that of Ukraine. That, in fact, remains to be seen.

Domestic instability together with the management of a multi-vectorial foreign policy demonstrate the complementarity of the internal and external dimensions in Ukraine’s external

²² “Ukraine: ‘orange’ coalition deal initialled, but have lessons of past been learned?”, *RFE/RL* 16 October 2007.

²³ Source: MFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) of Ukraine, “Yulia Tymoshenko: I will strive to establish a relationship of equal partnership with Russia”, *Financial Times*, 24 December 2007, at <http://www.kmu.gov.au/control/en>.

²⁴ Source: MFA of Ukraine, 23 January 2008, Comment of the Press Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine in connection with the comment of the Department for Information and the Press of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation of January 22, 2008, at <http://www.kmu.gov.au/control/en>. MFA of Ukraine, 14 December 2007, Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine on the occasion of the EU Reform Treaty signature at the European Council Summit in Lisbon, at <http://www.kmu.gov.au/control/en>.

²⁵ “Tymoshenko Says Ukrainian Crisis is Over”, *RFE/RL*, 10 December 2008.



relations. Taking advantage from, retracting with or balancing between East and West, Kiev's option shows the need for a creative combination of these multiple vectors in its foreign policy, as a necessary, though not sufficient condition, for its affirmation internationally and for a real consolidation of the transition course at home. The following sections will look at these two broad dimensions in Ukraine's foreign policy and how they affect and have effect in Ukraine's policy making and external options.

4. Ukraine's Western lookin: the EU, NATO and the United States

Post-Soviet Ukraine has followed since 1991 an independent course, despite its location conditioning to a great extent the contours of its foreign policy. The Ukrainian multi-vectorial policy has been understood in the West as a kind of mask for maneuvers by the political elites, searching for benefits both in Western friendship and Russian amity. This uncertainty associated to the goals of foreign policy – not well defined, unclear and volatile – has not played in favor of integration in the West, allowing a continuous game of articulation and disarticulation to try to conciliate interests and politics.

After the December 2004 Orange Revolution, Ukraine's Westward looking seems on track, despite many difficulties, both regarding domestic reforms and international pressure/constraints. Ukraine followed an approach based on the understanding that the European and Russian vectors in the country's foreign policy are complementary, while acknowledging that Ukraine's integration into European structures still requires the implementation of deep reforms. This course reflects the cross-cutting nature of the self-definition of Ukraine and its relation to the understanding of the other, with the West weighing in the Ukrainian construct as the 'benign other', pushing for the domestic agenda to reflect a political choice in external affairs, and adding to the debate the relevance of internal popular support for the options made towards further integration into Western institutions.

The path to European integration seems, in this context, to gain consistency. "Ukraine is ready to walk the distance to meet the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership. I would like to state in clear terms that we realize that the bulk of the work to integrate Ukraine into the EU has to be done by Ukrainians themselves".²⁶ Yushchenko understands the European and Russian vectors in the country's foreign policy as parallel, but understands that Ukrainian integration in structures such as NATO and the EU still requires the accomplishment of an enlarged number of reforms and deep restructuring. If the Orange Revolution was a positive sign, the stagnation resulting from political instability and the consequent inability to rapidly overcome dissension were cause of concern.

Moreover, the Ukrainian President made it clear that this deepening of relations with Western countries and structures should not hurt ties with Russia, thus revealing a cautious approach. If on the one hand this caution shows a desire at conciliation and complementarity, on the other hand it is also a factor for suspicion and questioning about Ukrainian real intentions. This hard balancing, in an effort to please its neighbors both to the East and West, carries with it serious implications regarding the building of perceptions and its implications.

The election of Yanukovich as Prime Minister raised concerns about a possible shift in policy formulation, with signs of retraction from the Western option, but soon the new

²⁶ President Yushchenko cited in: "... declares EU membership as Ukraine's ultimate goal", *RFE/RL Newswire* 24 February 2005.



premier described the EU as a “strategic goal” in the country’s foreign policy.²⁷ Ukraine defined its role as that of a “reliable bridge between Europe and Russia”,²⁸ thus still aspiring at keeping its in-between status. However, this in-between status is currently not more than just an aspiration given the international setting after 9/11 as well as the contradictory signs emanating from Kiev and which do not have been functioning as confidence building measures.

The EU acknowledges Ukrainian intentions to join the Union, though membership is not on the agenda. The strategic partnership between the EU and Ukraine aims at promoting harmonization in relations in such a way as to facilitate economic and political cooperation. The EU is supporting legislative harmonization in Ukraine and has opened up the possibility of negotiating a free trade zone on the condition that Ukraine joins the World Trade Organization (WTO).²⁹ The Ukrainian authorities have expressed their satisfaction for formal accession to the WTO in May 2008, with support both from Europe and the US.³⁰

Relations between Ukraine and the EU are framed within the principles of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) which entered into force in 1998, focusing on political dialogue, trade and economic relations, and democratic-related issues. A whole set of institutional dealings, including meetings, working committees, and specialized talks render substance to these objectives. After the 2004 enlargement, the EU became the largest trading partner of Ukraine, having primacy before Russia; and in December 2005 it granted market economy status to Ukraine. In addition, Ukraine is part of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), launched in March 2003 as a mechanism to bring the EU closer to the new states at its borders. ENP translates an offer of further cooperation and the sharing of benefits, without containing the prospect of future membership. In this context, the EU-Ukraine Action Plan concluded in February 2005 further reinforces the PCA commitments, becoming a privileged tool for promoting political and economic reforms in Ukraine. However, not without criticism. Ukraine does not completely agree with the wording used, regarding their implicit treatment of the country as a neighbor of Europe, when Ukraine feels it is part of Europe, and by the implicit nature of the ENP as a mechanism not precluding enlargement. Therefore, the negotiations for an “enhanced agreement” between the EU and Ukraine³¹ have been underlined by diplomatic pressure of Kiev over an open door policy regarding an eventual future joining of the EU.³²

The EU Common Strategy on Ukraine, negotiated in 1999, defines the contours for the relationship based on shared values and common interests in the promotion of an area of

²⁷ See for example Pastukhov, Vladimir: “Ukraine is not with Russia”, *Russian Politics and Law*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2006), p. 47.

²⁸ “EU remains ‘strategic goal’”, *RFE/RL* 5 September 2006.

²⁹ Ferrero-Waldner, Benita: “Ukraine”, Delegation of the European Commission to Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus, 19 February 2005.

³⁰ Ukraine has been a member of the WTO since 16 May 2008 See official WTO webpage at http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/countries_e/ukraine_e.htm.

³¹ Negotiations on a new enhanced agreement between the EU and Ukraine, to be the successor of the PCA, started in March 2007, http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/ukraine/index_en.htm. See also Council of the European Union, EU-Ukraine Summit, Joint Statement, Kiev, 12927/07 (Presse 199), 14 September 2007.

³² “Ukraine’s PM Yulia Tymoshenko: I cannot see any alternative to Europe”, European Parliament External Relations, *Press Release*, 29 January 2008; “I am totally persuaded of the European future of Ukraine”, says Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko”, European Parliament External Relations, *Press Release*, 28 January 2008. A concern that dates back in time, see for example President Yushchenko “Europe lacks Ukraine”, *Press Office of the President*, 30 January 2005; “Yushchenko believes EU’s integration is logical”, *Press Office of the President*, 29 June 2005.



security, growth and stability across Europe. Having in mind the pro-Western choice in Ukrainian politics, the Union defined as priorities support for the democratic and economic transition process in Ukraine; ensuring stability and security, and meeting common challenges on the European continent; and support for strengthened cooperation between the EU and Ukraine within the context of EU enlargement.³³ However, these commitments have not always revealed an efficient application and task-oriented shaping regarding the necessary support to the process of Ukrainian transition and the consolidation of the country's path towards democratization.³⁴ And in fact, this has been one of the main obstacles to Ukraine's future accession, with internal instability, political uncertainty and economic unreliability hampering foreign policy mechanisms to raise internationally the country's profile. Nevertheless, Ukraine is regarded by Brussels as a fundamental piece in the Central European puzzle with its commitment to the EU Border Assistance Mission,³⁵ in the frontier with Transnistria and its potential role in the finding of a solution to the Moldovan-Transnistrian conflict, demonstrating in-between the lines an understanding from Brussels that Ukraine might be a leading regional player in the stabilization of the Eastern periphery (the "sandwiched" countries between the EU and Russia, i.e. Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus).

In addition, internal disagreement over foreign policy options further deepens antagonistic opinions questioning the priorities targeted. The NATO bid is one such issue of controversy. Despite statements in this direction were voiced already in 1991 and have been recurrent afterwards, this has been a difficult issue. NATO enlargement to the East is not welcomed in Moscow which has strongly opposed to the Alliance moves and even threatened some of the new republics in the former Soviet area with sanctions. The interruptions in gas delivery to Ukraine have been linked to such options. This issue will be further developed, but it reveals pressure from Russia against an option the Kremlin finds unsatisfactory, as well as raising doubts in Europe about Ukraine's capability to act autonomously and decide independently from its giant neighbor. The pressure effect and the conditions attached have led Ukraine to adopt a differentiated policy regarding its integration into NATO and the EU.

The governing leaders have adopted a so-called "step-by-step" approach towards NATO, while using a more clear discourse towards the EU, meaning the gradual consolidation of cooperation with the Atlantic Alliance. This approach is justified on declining popular support for NATO accession, and on the fact that cooperation has been in place at both headquarters level and on the ground, through the involvement of Ukrainian troops in NATO exercises.³⁶ The formal declaration of intention of Ukraine regarding joining NATO's Membership Action Plan might signal a shift in this more cautious approach towards a more incisive policy, though Prime Minister Tymoshenko has already reaffirmed that this is

³³ European Council Common Strategy on Ukraine, (1999/877/CFSP), 11 December 1999.

³⁴ See Freire, Maria Raquel: "A Revolução Laranja na Ucrânia: Uma Democracia a Consolidar", *Relações Internacionais*, no. 2 (2006), pp. 49-64; Solonenko, Iryna "The European Union as Democracy Promoter: The Case of Ukraine", *Romanian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2006):, pp. 57-69; Molchanov, Mikhail: "Ukraine and the European Union: A Perennial Neighbour?", *European Integration*, vol. 26, no. 4 (2004), pp. 451-473.

³⁵ The EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) was launched in June 2005. For further detail see EUBAM's webpage on <http://www.eubam.org/>.

³⁶ As an example, cooperation between NATO and Ukraine involves the NATO-Ukraine Commission, the Joint Working Group on Defense Reform and NATO PfP Trust Fund projects. Cooperation is framed in the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between NATO and Ukraine, of July 1997.



a decision that will be subject to a referendum,³⁷ again stressing the popular element as a new, or better, an explicit element regarding the course of Ukrainian politics.

In addition, and further deepening disagreement between Ukraine and Russia, Crimean separatism and the geostrategic relevance of the peninsula, add to complexity. This is an area identified by NATO as of much relevance for access to the Black Sea, where Russian and Turkey are the leading powers. The naval basis of Sebastopol, where the Black Sea Fleet is stationed, and which will have to be returned to Ukraine by Russia until 2017 might still be one more source of dissension in the redrawing of the political-security and strategic map of the area. In the meantime, it is source of recurrent tension in the bilateral relationship, with for example the announcement in January 2009 that Russia would deploy a submarine in the basis leading to further attrition. Along with these delicate issues, the post-2008 war in Georgia seems to have added to watchfulness policies, rendering the prospects for Ukraine and Georgia joining NATO in the very near future grim, despite recognition within NATO that its support to both these countries had to be clear and continuous. Russian played once more its card of a strong holder in the former Soviet area.

The generally more cautious approach, as a result of the hard balance Kiev searches for in its foreign options, has been interpreted in Washington as a sign of weakness and of an uncompromising attitude from Kiev. The relationship with Ukraine, which has been frosted, cool and amicable, is now at a good cooperation point. Washington realizes Ukraine is an important partner in the region, and that it might check on Russia given uncertainty about Moscow's role and position.³⁸ Therefore, the US has offered support to the reform course towards a working democratic system and market-oriented economy. This is, nevertheless, not without conditions: there is a trade-off of support to joining the WTO and NATO, by concrete progress in democratization and market reformation. The US support has been much concentrated on economic issues, with agreement over a system of preferences and trade benefits, recognition of Ukraine as having a market economy status, and normalization of trade relations after the wavering of the Jackson-Vanik restrictions to commercial relations.³⁹

Energy is also an issue on the top of the agendas for both the US and Europe, with routes for pipelines coming from the Caspian and Russia to Europe crossing Ukraine and rendering it a strategic location in energetic issues. The country could take advantage from this strategic position, but Russia has not been as cooperative as it could, using oil and gas as a tool for pressuring the authorities in Kiev. A misinterpretation as called by Russian authorities who argue they only have been practicing market prices, and that Ukraine is capitalizing on its strategic location and on foregone privileged relations with Russia to attempt both at getting better energy prices and Western support. The Odessa-Brody pipeline could be exploited to the profit of Ukraine, but constructive engagement with the rich-oil producers nearing the Caspian and Russia is essential but not always easy. Thus, Ukraine remains dependent on Russian goodwill and predisposition for cooperation, leaving Kiev in an uncomfortable position. An issue further analyzed next.

³⁷ "Yulia Tymoshenko: decision on Ukraine's accedence to NATO can be approved only by the Government of Ukraine at the all-Ukrainian referendum", Ukraine's Government Portal, *Press Office of CMU*, 19 January 2008, at <http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/en>.

³⁸ Kubicek, Paul (): "US-Ukrainian Relations: From Engagement to Estrangement", *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 50, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 2003), p. 4.

³⁹ Kramer, David: Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, *speech at the Woodrow Wilson Center*, Washington DC, 21 March 2006; Dobriansky, Paul: Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs, *Remarks to the American Enterprise Institute*, Washington DC, 5 December 2005.



5. Ukraine's Eastern looking: Russia and the CIS

Neighboring Russia, Ukraine has played the game of national affirmation, retraction and vacillation according to the position of Moscow and the path the authorities in Kiev have chosen. Sometimes, however, this choice is directed or at least conditioned by external pressure, such as the reduction or interruption of oil and gas supplies from Russia. Ukraine depends on Russian energetic resources and on Russia as an important commercial partner, what confers on its independence a sense of dependence. However, and functioning as a counterweight, Moscow recognizes the relevance of good relations with Kiev, due to its strategic location, market potential and due to the presence of a large Russian minority in the country, not reducing Ukraine to a status of subservience, to Moscow's dislike.⁴⁰ In fact, the distribution of gas and oil at reduced prices to Ukraine has been matter of dissension. Despite the settling of the gas dispute with Moscow in January 2006, this has been a recurrent source of pressure from the Kremlin. And despite hopes to the contrary, it was not the Yanukovych's leadership to manage to obtain compensations at this level. Ukraine reached a gas deal with the Kremlin for 2007, assuring a no-repeat of the previous year crisis;⁴¹ however, in early 2008 and again in 2009 (with President Dmitry Medvedev in power in Russia) new gas rows were imminent with Russia reducing its supplies on the grounds of the Ukrainian gas debt, showing persistent differences which were, nevertheless, quickly overcome at the negotiations table. Again, the energetic asset used by the Kremlin as a demonstration of force in the form of political and economic pressure over the Ukrainian authorities.

Besides keeping an eye on its Ukrainian neighbor, the Kremlin adopted a more assertive stance trying to get Ukraine back to its sphere of influence, playing with the pro-Russian orientation of Yanukovich's government. The resignation of Foreign Minister Tarasyuk in January 2007, one of the few remaining pro-Western key figures in that government, was immediately congratulated in Russia as a further step away from integration in the West. These ups-and-downs in Ukrainian politics have been exploited by the Russian authorities to the most, and have been rendering difficult to Ukraine to keep an equal distance from Brussels and Moscow. And in fact the early 2007 developments seem to point to a larger distancing from Brussels than regarding Moscow. This does not mean, however, a turning away from the West or a definite return to the old Slavic union, as demonstrated by the new shift propelled by the anticipated legislatives that took place in the fall of 2007 giving a slim majority to a renewed orange coalition, and again reversing the rules of the game.

Delicate issues such as border delimitation, the status of Crimea and of the Russian population in the country, the division of the Black Sea Fleet, the construction of pipelines in Ukrainian territory, and the destiny of military equipment have been object of discord. The Ukrainian authorities did not simply renounce to their rights or did concessions without rewards, concentrating on their national interests, causing in instances tension with the Kremlin. The asymmetrical bi-directional internal/external relationship, mentioned earlier, becomes here explicit. Despite most of these problems having already been overcome, the resolution of these matters did not mean directly an improvement in the relationship between the two. This became evident in the weak compromise of Ukraine regarding integration in the

⁴⁰ Freire, Maria Raquel (2008): "The Russian Federation and CIS States", in Kolodziej Edward A. and Kanet Roger E. (eds.), *Consensual or Coervive Hegemon: Either or Neither? American Power and Global Order*, Athens GA, University of Georgia Press.

⁴¹ In 2007, Ukraine is paying Russia \$130 per 1000 cubic meters of gas, while Belarus rate is at \$100. Moldova and Georgia pay more, with the former paying \$170, and the latter a much higher price of \$235.



Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which the Ukrainian authorities see as an obstacle to its integration in European structures, in particular the EU. Foreign Minister Tarasyuk has commented that “[i]f we are talking about a free trade zone [within the CIS Single Economic Space (SES)], in principle this would not cause any problems in terms of integration within the EU or our membership in the WTO. If we are talking about a deeper level of integration [within the CIS SES], there could be problems”.⁴²

Therefore, and in parallel to the SES, Ukraine has been deepening economic relations with the EU, meaning a downgrading of SES and an upgrading of economic ties with the EU. This means that, on the one hand, the SES is becoming irrelevant in Ukrainian political-economic dealings, visible in the light involvement and scarce commitment within this framework, with the implications resulting regarding its relations with Russia. On the other hand, Kiev has obtained market economy status from the EU, obtained support for accession into the WTO and negotiated a free trade area with the Union. In addition, the Ukrainian parliament has not ratified the CIS Charter, thus Ukraine is technically not a member of the CIS,⁴³ conferring on it some leverage over Moscow, particularly when the CIS and its associated agreements are increasingly understood as a disguised form for the Kremlin to reassert its power. “The Russians are considering SES to be not only a shape for the multi-national in-depth cooperation, but also as a tool for achieving regional international stability on the most suitable basis”.⁴⁴ A policy-goal not in line with Ukrainian voiced autonomy and independence course, along with the confirmation that “Ukraine regarded the CIS as a means of civilized ‘divorce’, not as the basis for a new integration”.⁴⁵ Thus, differentiated approaches in terms of foreign policy goals definition and implementation, leading to time-consuming negotiations and much bargaining between the sides.

In this line, the relationship between Ukraine and Russia seems to have overcome a period of personalization incarnated by Presidents Yeltsin and Kuchma, to one of moderate pragmatism, where complex and time consuming negotiations seem to underline interests increasingly difficult to reconcile. In fact, Ukraine was one of the founding members of GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova), an alternative to the Russian efforts of integration, and benefiting from north-American support. Uzbekistan left the organization in 2002, following a re-approximation to Russia and a clear backing away from the West, reducing it to GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova). With the problems that the CIS faces and the colorful revolutions in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and in Ukraine, GUAM has been getting a new impulse, intending to assume itself as promoter of cooperation in the area of energy and transports, as well as on security matters. In May 2006, the four members agreed on the reformulation of its designation to become Organization for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM, leaving clear the wish of approximation to the EU and NATO, developments regarding which Russia will not remain indifferent.⁴⁶

In fact, Russia has increasingly voiced its opposition to the Ukrainian bid to join NATO, leading the country to retreat. Russian Defense Minister Ivanov has stated that a

⁴² Ukrainian Foreign Minister Tarasyuk cited in Jan Maksymiuk, “Analysis: Moscow steps in the check Kyiv’s European drive”, *RFE/RL* 24 February 2005.

⁴³ Kuzio, Taras: “Ukraine and Euro-Atlantic Integration”, *Kyiv Post*, 16 January 2003.

⁴⁴ Parakhonsky, Boris: “Present Challenges for Ukraine-Russia Bilateral Relations”, *Ukrainian Monitor Policy Papers*, no. 14 (2004). See also Trenin, *op. cit.*; Khokhotva, Ivan (2003): “Dead on arrival”, *Transition*, 29 September.

⁴⁵ Simon, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁴⁶ Freire, *op. cit.*.



decision by Ukraine to join the Atlantic Alliance will “inevitably” affect bilateral relations.⁴⁷ This pressure demonstrates the permanence of old ghosts from the Soviet era, particularly among the military establishment in Moscow, and a resurgence of myths that have revealed useful in restraining the Ukrainian Westwards course. But simultaneously, the Kremlin’s discourse pays to the West, by repeating that Russia sees no problem in NATO’s enlargement and that the relationship institutionalized so far with the Atlantic Alliance has produced fruitful cooperation. These changes in discourse and contradictory arguments make it difficult to grasp Russian real ambitions and intentions regarding NATO. But despite statements such as, “[w]e never saw NATO as a hostile organization. It’s another matter that we believed – and we continue to hold this belief – that simply expanding NATO will not answer the challenges of the present day”,⁴⁸ the National Security document as well as many other documents and statements make it clear that the NATO issue is not an easy matter for Russia.⁴⁹

Thus, Ukrainian foreign policy towards Russia swings continuously between (in)dependence and reciprocity, where both countries have vital interests in keeping a cooperative relationship, while acknowledging simultaneously the difficulties in coping with differences.

6. Conclusion: Ukraine’s Multi-Vector Foreign Policy

In 1991 Ukraine underwent a national revolution, while in 2004 it witnessed a democratic revolution, described by Yushchenko as “a definite end to its post-Soviet period”.⁵⁰ In 1991 Ukraine recovered its independence regaining its national identity, while in 2004 it was this same national identity that was in the basis of the demands for change and democratization, implying more liberties, governing transparency, and institutional responsibility. The problems faced after the 2006 legislative elections came to demonstrate, on the one side, the difficulties in implementing democratic principles, and on the other hand, the discontent that this process generated, by its prorogation, demands and weak compensations, associated to corruption and illicit activities that became known in the public domain. Again, the reverse course in the legislatives of 2007 follows the same reasoning of discontent and expression of an expectations gap.

In this complex process, the inter-linkages between the agent-structure at the two levels identified before, i.e. in terms of the international context where Ukraine acts, and regarding the relation between the Ukrainian governing authorities and the population, are fundamental. Internally, popular support for the reformist course has been both offering opportunities for change, and working as hindrance to progress. Simultaneously, while playing with its multi-vectorial foreign policy, Ukraine needs to manage its domestic differences and external options. This balancing has revealed difficult, with a much needed equilibrium between East and West which finds a parallel within Ukrainian internal politics, also searching for a constant balance regarding domestic and foreign policy options and implementation policies.

⁴⁷ “Russia warns Ukraine against joining NATO”, *RFE/RL*, 7 December 2006.

⁴⁸ Putin, Vladimir: Russian President’s interview with radio Slovenko and the Slovakian Television Channel STV, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Information and Press Department*, Moscow, 22 February 2005.

⁴⁹ See also Polyakov, Leonid: “Current Russian-Ukrainian Rapprochement: Forward or Backward? A Rejoinder”, *Security Dialogue*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2002), p. 175.

⁵⁰ Kuzio, *op. cit.*, p. 42.



Ukraine has pursued a diversified foreign policy with President Kuchma playing simultaneously the NATO, EU and Russia cards. A clear signal of the in-between identity underlining Ukrainian politics and that has been allowing a constant play between these differentiated dimensions in its foreign dealings. Despite Russia having substantial influence over Ukrainian politics, in particular regarding its dependence on energetic resources, this has not impeded Ukraine from opting for a multi-vector foreign policy, involving a Western and an Eastern dimension. The impact of September 11, conjugated with the scandals of the Kuchma administration and accusations regarding human rights violations, caused distancing between Ukraine and its Western partners. These tensions have, nevertheless, been gradually lightened, with the generalized social movement of contest to the regime filling up the streets with demands for reforms, and culminating in the 2004 Orange Revolution, as a positive catalyst element. The path then onwards has not been without difficulties clearly showing the inter-linkage between the internal and the external in the expressions of foreign policy.

As for Russia, and despite acknowledging the relevance of Ukraine as a partner, the Kremlin politics have dictated a continuous balancing between pressure and concessions, putting the Russian-Ukrainian relationship in a tense record. This has caused Kiev to act with caution, either in line with Moscow directives or opposing to these as a signal that it does not want to return to a past of policy-directing and control. Thus, reality showing that while a good relationship with Russia should not be unconsidered, Western assistance to economic growth and consolidation of the new regime is also fundamental.

The mix of power and perceptions has, therefore, been having expression in the Ukrainian external policy construct, with the definition of a multi-vectorial foreign policy amalgamating forces in tension, at the domestic level with opposing views and a not always easy to deal with relationship between the central ruling authorities and the population, and at the external level through the constant equation of cost-benefit options towards a recognized need of balancing East and West in the foreign policy agenda of the country.

The cards are on the table, and it is up to the new political administration in Ukraine to implement the announced effort at reformation. Its success remains uncertain, especially given the growing disenchantment with the poor results of the Orange Revolution, and the political-institutional instability associated, but what seems certain is that “hence forth, Ukraine will not be ignored by Europe or be a client state of Russia”.⁵¹ And in the multi-vector policy formulations of Ukraine this is revolutionary, demonstrating the country’s commitment to change. However, this revolutionary character underlining these changes will only be consolidated if Kiev manages to keep this balancing between an Eastern and Western look in such a way that it produces results.

“Foreign policy-making is a complex process of interaction between many actors, differentially embedded in a wide range of different structures. Their interaction is a dynamic process, leading to the constant evolution of both actors and structures”.⁵² Therefore, the inter-linkage between the internal and the external in Ukraine results in a combination that reveals a no-option: East and West as two fundamental elements in both internal consolidation and external cooperation. Not always pushing in the same direction, not always matching the expectations, not always fostering positive integration, this dichotomy has become a reality in Ukrainian politics. This means that besides fostering concrete cooperation, there is a need for a clear expression of the Ukrainian will and intentions, not becoming submissive or highly

⁵¹ Lavelle, Peter (2005): “Analysis: Ukraine, Russia start anew”, *The Washington Times*, 12 January.

⁵² Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 28.



dependable, while assuring its position as a reliable partner. Fundamental ingredients for the cooking of its multi-vector foreign policy recipe.