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UKRAINIAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD RUSSIA BETWEEN 1991 AND 2004: THE START OF THE CONFLICT

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Abstract: After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine's foreign policy evolved in the geopolitical sphere of Central and Eastern Europe. As a result, the new Ukrainian interests were built on a sense of national identity. They looked to Russia and Europe to find a sense of national identity. However, Ukraine's Eurasian and Central-European ancestry caused a distinct rift in society about national identity, which influenced the formulation of foreign policy. Those trying to co-exist with Russia find it difficult to develop a Ukrainian identity completely different from Russia, justifying the togetherness through the Pereyaslav agreement. On the contrary, the nationalist-minded Ukrainians, those who want to cultivate an identity distinct from the Russians and, more specifically, look for a Central-European identity, try to influence the course of the foreign policy formation of Ukraine by citing their historicity of Europeanness with the medieval principedom of Kiev and viewing the Pereyaslav memory as disastrous for Ukraine's independent existence. Thus, national identity is one of the main causes of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. This study aims to uncover significant events in Ukrainian foreign policy toward Russia that led to modern-day conflict.

Keywords: Ukraine; Russia; Foreign Policy; USSR; Identity

INTRODUCTION

In many ways, the fall of the Soviet Union changed the bounds of Ukrainian-Russian contact. Their relationship was thrown into the unfamiliar framework of 'foreign policy', and conflicts on various topics occurred. During the presidency of Leonid Kravchuk (the first President of Ukraine), issues ranging from international debt repayment to energy supply, from the future of the Black Sea Fleet to the division of former Soviet property, from the shape of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to control and ownership of nuclear weapons dominated the Ukraine-Russian relationship, dominated their bilateral relations in the ensuing years (D'Anieri 2019). Renunciation of all links with Russia and a new westward orientation were critical factors in Ukraine's establishment of its own identity. Regardless of the various sources of threats identified in Ukraine, Russia was considered a severe security threat to Ukrainian independence. Ukrainian analysts viewed integration into the European Union as a highly appealing option. However, geopolitical circumstances prompted Ukraine not to isolate itself

from Russia entirely. Eastern Ukraine prefers a greater alliance with Russia, and the approaching economic catastrophe in Ukraine necessitates a deeper partnership with Russia.

As Ukraine was faced with the urgent task of preserving and consolidating its only economically feasible trade and industrial links with Russia, a realistic assessment of the Ukrainian economic situation called for a more pragmatic foreign policy agenda. In contrast to his predecessor, President Leonid Kuchma reshaped relations between Russia and Ukraine from confrontational idealism to economic pragmatism. His realistic approach to foreign policy marked a new era in the Ukraine-Russia relationship. The endorsement of a pragmatic approach in Kiev was matched by a remarkable change of attitude in Moscow. At the end of Ukraine's third year of independence, Russia was forced to accept the reality that Ukraine was developing into a fully sovereign state. As Ukraine represents an area of Russia's vital interests, it also tried to establish relations with Ukraine of stable, conflict-free, and mutually non-provocative cooperation as an alternative to a competitive partnership. Ukraine also no longer looked upon economic cooperation with Russia and the CIS as an unfortunate necessity but as an urgent requirement. Ukrainian leaders softened their policy on Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet (BSF) to get economic resources from Russia. Soon, it became an associate member of the CIS Economic Union, and the willingness of Kuchma to stay engaged in the CIS enabled Ukraine to continue obtaining economic resources from Russia. The signing of the treaty of 'Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership' between Ukraine and the Russian Federation on 31 May 1997, solved the dispute over the Black Sea Fleet and became an important landmark in the ties between the countries, opening up "a new age in the history of the Ukraine-Russia relationship" and laying a firm foundation for the further development of mutually beneficial cooperation (Grant 2015).

Ukraine became closer to Russia over time due to a lack of economic reform and a decline in the availability of Western economic resources. Their cooperation was further enhanced when Ukraine boosted its involvement in the CIS Anti-Terrorist Center and chose pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich as Prime Minister in November 2002. Despite disagreements on a wide range of issues, including economic, political, and, most importantly, security issues, Russia and Ukraine were able to work out their differences, and the Ukraine-Russia partnership remained positive and less confrontational, in contrast to the period from 1994 to 2004 (Miller and Toritsyn 2005). Despite Ukraine's fear of an imperial Russia, nationalists' strong opposition to developing close relations with it, and its desire for Euro-Atlantic integration, Ukraine developed good relations with Russia.

Thus, this paper will analyze Ukrainian foreign policy toward Russia and how a larger crisis emerged.

UKRAINE-RUSSIA RELATIONSHIP AND THE EXISTENCE OF FEAR FACTOR: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Before and after independence, Ukraine's relations with Russia were always guided by the fear factor, as Ukraine perceived Russia as a threat to its independent existence. The Ukrainian historical memory of Pereyaslav led to a long series of disasters, such as the defeat of the Cossack leader Mazepa at Poltava in 1709; the liquidation of independent Cossack institutions later in the eighteenth century; Tsar Alexander II's Ems Decree of 1876 that banned

virtually all publications in Ukrainian; and the Ukrainian famine of the early 1930s, created on Stalin's order (Morrison 1993), urges them to maintain a distance from Russia. Furthermore, the Russian elites' post-independence political behavior, such as a lack of respect for Ukrainian independence, territorial claims against Ukraine, and direct involvement in numerous nationalistic conflicts inside and outside its borders (Alexandrova 1994), compelled the Ukrainian leadership to close their doors to Russia firmly. However, the traditional version of Russian history fails to see Ukraine as a separate entity different from Russia. For Russians, at best, Ukrainians are 'younger brothers', junior shareholders in the Russian empire rather than its victims (Morrison 1993). Ukraine and Russia see their relationship differently from their respective perspectives discussed below.

Ukraine's View of the Relationship

Before 1648, Ukraine was part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, whose eastern frontier extended to the East of the Dnieper River. After the Pereyaslav agreement of 1654, a part of that vast territory (today's regions of Polotova and Chemihiv with the city of Kiev) came under the rule of the Tsar in Moscow, where Ukraine was known as Little Russia and its subjects as Little Russians in the Russian empire (Plokhy 2017). In addition to being the autocrat of Great Russia, the Tsar also became the sovereign of Little Russia. Nevertheless, Little Russia did not thereby become part of Russia in the modern national sense. This Little Russia, a pre-modern or historic Ukrainian Cossack nation, retained its government, laws, and institutions after acceptance under the Tsar's specter for at least a century. When the nation-building project of Russia called for the elimination of Little Russia's separate identity, it was precisely in the final decade of Little Russia's autonomous existence that its rights began to be defended in a language revealing a modern conception of the nation (Szporluk 1997). However, before the Ukrainians put forward their national agenda, Russia's nation and state-building were already underway in ways that had ramifications for those we may call the Ukrainian subjects of the empire. Especially during the Russian Catherine II's reign (1762–1796), St. Petersburg held the view that the elimination of Little Russia's traditional institutions was just one element of a larger state and nation-building project and thus required a variety of measures, the main aim of which was to achieve the complete integration of Little Russia into the Russian state and Russian society (Lowish 2021).

The construction of a Russian identity, which included the construction of national history, built around the idea of a state distinguished by a thousand-year-old history, was first formulated in connection with Ukraine being incorporated into Russia after 1654 (Bureiko and Moga 2019). This corollary was to disinherit the Ukrainians from any claim to historic statehood and, thereby, deny them any future claim to independent statehood. The Russians further embellished their history by granting later to the grand principality of Moscow the claim of the sole legitimate and direct successor of Kiev - first by invoking dynastic and religious arguments and then, in the age of ethnic nationalism, by claiming an ethnic identity between the modern Russian nation and the state of Kievan Rus (862-1242), denying any legitimacy as Kiev's heirs to other polities that functioned in the post-Kiev space. As ethnic nationalism intensified throughout XIX century Europe, this operation was carried one step further. The Great Russians

declared themselves to be the real Russians. At the same time, the Ukrainians and Byelorussians were viewed either as junior branches of the Russian family or as Russians corrupted by foreign influences (Szporluk 2020).

This imperial version of the Russian nation, which was defined by its confrontation with the West, had important domestic implications for the status of Little Russian history and society. However, Catherine's Little Russia was aware and took pride in being a child of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Its defenders also asserted their right against the empire by invoking Little Russia's past ties with the Commonwealth (Hillis 2013). Furthermore, the construction of Ukrainian national history that 'seceded' from the imperial version of Russian history include the declaration of a link of continuity in political tradition between Little Russia, itself a direct product of the Cossack association with the Commonwealth on the one hand, and Kievan Rus on the other. The defense of Little Russia was expressed in works of literature, theater, and historical, philosophical, and other research.

In this regard, the Ukrainian national poet Taras Shevchenko's (1814-1861) role was noticeable as he began to see the political significance of his native culture and nationalized it by making its language a medium of artistic expression (Glaser 2017). In due course of time, this literary separatism necessarily implied political separatism with the idea that Ukrainian society, a nation, matched with that literature. However, the Russians did not understand that Shevchenko represented a qualitatively new stage in the formation of Ukraine and the decline of Little Russia. Interestingly enough, as the Ukrainians were operating in the bipolar Russian-Polish world, some Poles gradually accepted the emergence of a Ukrainian nation. However, the Russians continued to regard them as their province. Soon after, Russians saw the connection between the Polish and Ukrainian situations. St. Petersburg determined that the Ukrainian movement resulted from a Polish scheme to dismember the Russian people in Ukraine. The first limits on the use of the Ukrainian language were imposed in 1863 by the so-called Valuyev Ukaz, named for the minister of interior (Hosking 2012). The government, which had the support of a major portion of the people in this regard, judged that the Ukrainian phenomenon was harmful, even though Ukrainians, unlike Poles, confined their activity to literary and scientific interests.

In the XX century, when the formation of modern Ukraine intensified, in the same fashion as the tsarist state, the Soviet occupation crushed the national aspirations of the Ukrainians, characterized by oppression and inhumanity. From the beginning of the Russian revolution of 1917 to 1921 (when Russian Communist party control had been established in Ukraine and was active), the period witnessed the Ukrainian liberation war. Ukraine politically and physically fought for its independence and rights of self-determination against the Russian Communist Party and Red Army (Skirda 2014). However, the call for Ukrainian independence and separation caused great concern for the provisional government and Bolshevik leadership. A reevaluation of the benefits of keeping Ukraine under the Petrograd (and Moscow after 1918) justification meant that there was a strong organized opposition force in the Bolshevik party determined not to lose such a "pearl of Russia" (Chumachenko 2008).

In 1922, the situation was such that there was Soviet Ukraine and Polish-controlled Western Ukraine, and both these areas were ruled by occupational powers that had used force to get what they wanted and had then signed treaties with one another, giving the appearance that all was in order (Gardner 2015). The West indirectly acknowledged and ratified this partition

and occupation of Ukraine by giving Poland sovereignty over Eastern Galicia in March 1923. On the other hand, Soviet Ukraine was left in 1923, having signed two union treaties (8 December 1920 and 30 December 1923) confirming that it was a member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Rothschild 2017). However, Stalin was determined to deny Ukraine's right to self-determination and denied that Ukraine had a national question or problem. This denial, often supported by the use of force, convinced the Soviet leadership that anti-Soviet and counter-revolutionary nationalistic elements in Ukraine were being oppressed to secure the essential well-being of the Soviet Union (Sullivant 1962). After independence from Soviet rule in December 1991, Russia's imperialistic revisionist policies also worried Ukrainians, as Russian politicians both in and out of office have either rejected or shown insufficient respect for Ukrainian independence (Bukkvoll 1997). The political and cultural elites have found it difficult to accept that Ukraine is an independent state and no longer a part of Russia.

For many others, including Russian Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi, Yeltsin's recognition of the independence of Ukraine was a betrayal, and the loss of Crimea, Sevastopol, Odesa, and other areas was unacceptable to the Russians (Morrison 1993). In May 1992, the Russian Supreme Soviet declared the 1954 decision to transfer Crimea to Ukraine illegal. In December 1992, the Congress of People's Deputies empowered the Supreme Soviet to consider the status of Sevastopol. A summer 1994 survey of the deputies in the Russian Duma also revealed that only 3.5 percent thought Crimea should belong to Ukraine (Morrison 1993). The deputy speaker of the Russian Supreme Soviet, Valentin Agatonov, in 1993 sent the Crimean parliament a letter stating that he was convinced that "no tricks or nationalistic babble can tear apart the historical blood-bonds between the people of Russia and Crimea" (Morrison 1993, 70). The most provocative step came in July 1993, when the Supreme Soviet claimed that Sevastopol was henceforth under Russian jurisdiction. As far as territorial integrity and borders are concerned, the Russian position was that it would respect the borders between the two countries, whereas Ukraine wanted the Russians to accept the borders (Morrison 1993).

Russia has also indicated that borders within the CIS should be regarded as only administrative guarded with minimum control and that common CIS borders troops should guard the borders with non-CIS countries. However, these are unacceptable and worrisome for Ukraine. Furthermore, nationalist Russian politicians and even the Russian legislature tried to keep Ukraine within their sphere of influence by using political, economic, and security means to revive its past glory. Using the political means, Russia continued to regard the CIS as the way to integrate former Soviet territory, be it in the form of a confederation, federation, or a union, and decided to become the key element of the CIS. For Russia, the creation of the CIS meant not liquidating the old center but the transfer of that center from Moscow as the Soviet capital to Moscow as the Russian capital (Crescenzi and Jaax 2017). Because of Ukraine's close links with and economic dependence on the former Soviet republics, especially Russia, and as it wanted to bring crucial socio-economic reforms, which must be carried out in close cooperation with these states, Russia used the economic means to keep Ukraine within its sphere of influence. Eighty percent of Ukraine's industrial production did not constitute a complete technological cycle inside the country's border (Bukkvoll 1997). The majority of the items needed for industrial production came from Russia. As Ukraine has depended upon Russia for oil and gas deliveries, Russia has a more convenient and flexible foreign policy tool in temporarily stopping or limiting

the supplies. Therefore, Ukraine has found itself under the threat of Russia's suspension of deliveries. In addition to this, the Ukrainian debt to Russia for oil and gas supply, which has risen steadily since independence, has further weakened the Ukrainian position (Bukkvoll 1997). For instance, in the summer of 1993, Russia tried to get Kravchuk to give up Ukraine's share of the Black Sea Fleet in turn for a reduction in the debt, and in 1994, the Russian oil and gas company Gazprom also wanted to take over parts of the Ukrainian pipeline system in exchange for debt reduction (Felgenhauer 1999).

Apart from this, Russia also tried to keep Ukraine within its axis through cooperation within the CIS by transforming the CIS Economic Union into a single Eurasian Economic Space, which has provisions to prohibit members of the CIS Economic Union from becoming members of other countries' economic and custom unions. Similarly, Russia attempted to integrate former Soviet territory by forming a military defense union within the framework of the CIS, with its self-appointed role as the CIS states' military policeman (Felgenhauer 1999). In the domain of culture and language, the Ukrainians also feel threatened. Ukrainians of nationalist persuasion worry that Russia's and Western penetration in the Ukrainian informational space is excessive and threatens ethnic Ukrainian cultural revitalization. Vasil Lyzanchuk, a professor of journalism at Lviv State University, expresses his sentiment about the continuing presence of Russia in Ukraine's informational space. To him:

Imperial and post-imperial means of mass communication (...) disgrace the Ukrainian state, its symbols, language, culture, traditions, and customs. In order to demoralize the spirit of national rebirth (...) [new Russian chauvinist], hiding behind the principles of freedom of speech and pluralistic thought, foist the thought that the Ukrainian people are disappointed with independence because it was a result of the disintegration of the USSR that life worsened, the mafia came to power, corruption developed, crime was unleashed to no limit, and a terrible social explosion will soon come (Shulman 1998, 297).

Another writer fears that Russian informational imperialism in the contest of undeveloped Ukrainian mass media will lead to the "erosion of the Ukrainian ethnocultural organism" and the "denationalization" of Ukraine (Shulman 1998, 297). Nationalist party leaders also consistently argued that Russian television, radio, and newspapers were 'anti-Ukrainian', giving misinformation about the new Ukrainian state and ridiculing its culture and politics. It is not only the allegedly anti-Ukrainian ideas that accompany Russian mass media penetration of Ukraine that are worrisome to Ukrainian nationalists but the presence of the Russian language itself (Shulman 1998). Finally, nationalists believe that through informational ties with Ukraine, Russia provides ideological and propagandistic assistance to anti-Ukrainian ethnic Russians living in Ukraine. Those mentioned above, the century-old imperial nature of Russia and its leaders' post-independence (1991-on) revisionist imperial attitude make Ukrainian leaders feel threatened. Therefore, despite the formal overthrow of Moscow's domination of Ukraine, the perceived threat of neo-colonial political, military, economic, and cultural domination over the new Ukrainian state promoted strong resistance toward Russia.

Due to the above, any Ukrainian leader who signs an agreement with Russia is immediately seen as risking a political surrender of independence on the pattern of 1654 (Trenin

2011). The result is a permanent inferiority complex and a lack of confidence in negotiating with Moscow. A fear that any deal with Russia is a potential trap, however favorable to Ukraine its terms might appear. In December 1991, when Kravchuk held his first news conference in Kiev after signing the tripartite agreement to establish the CIS largely on Ukrainian terms, he was accused of following in Khmelnytsky's footsteps and giving away Ukraine's sovereignty (Potichnyj 1991). History tells Ukrainians that promises made by Russia are always broken, which leads to the widespread unspoken assumption that Ukraine is also entitled to break its pledges when it sees fit. Consequently, the Ukrainian debate over nuclear weapons has been dominated by the widespread belief that any security guarantees offered by Russia to a non-nuclear Ukraine will be as worthless as the Tsar's promises in 1654 (Potichnyj 1991). As one commentator in a Kiev newspaper wrote:

With regards to Russian guarantees, we have heard enough fairy-tails. In the course of history, neither the Moscow state nor the Russian empire ever kept any of their promises (...) the most reliable Ukrainian history studies published in the West testify that developed economic relations and democratic institutions could not guarantee security and did not prevent the Moscow state from enslaving Ukraine after the so-called Pereyaslav agreement in the middle of the seventeenth century (Morrison 1993, 680).

Not surprisingly, the perception of Russia as a potential invader and enemy has made any search for common interests with Moscow exceptionally difficult. Relations with Moscow are perceived as a zero-sum game. Any sign of military weakness, or the slightest false diplomatic move, could put Ukraine's hard-won independent statehood at risk (Morrison 1993, 680).

Thus, Ukraine firmly closed its doors toward Russia and took a pro-Western orientation in its foreign policy as a policy measure. Keeping in mind the Russian position and intention to dominate in the CIS, Ukraine did not become a full member of the CIS by insisting on its independent position. Ukraine also did not accede to the CIS Inter-parliamentary Assembly in March 1992, the CIS Collective Security Act (The Tashkent Treaty) in May 1992, or the CIS Charter in February 1993. Finally, distrust of the CIS was formalized as the official Ukrainian strategy in the document 'Fundamental Guidelines in Ukrainian Foreign Policy' adopted by the parliament on 2 July 1993 (Rozanov and Dovgan 2010). This document includes the statement: "Ukraine will avoid participation in the institutionalization of forms of multilateral cooperation within the framework of the CIS which might transform the CIS into a supranational structure of a federal or confederate charter" (Bukkvoll 1997, 64). To extricate itself from the awkward situation of the suspension of oil and gas deliveries, Kravchuk tried to reduce its dependence on Russia and signed agreements with Turkey, Iran, and Turkmenistan. In order to maintain its independent position, Ukraine only held an associate membership in the CIS Economic Union. It has refused to join any CIS agreement on military integration in the same fashion.

Further, to defend its culture and language from Russian influence, a policy of 'de-Russification' was implemented internally. A policy of weakening its ties with Russia and strengthening ties with Europe was perceived as a signal in the right direction. The nationalists also uphold that integration with Europe will enrich Ukraine's culture and facilitate the rebirth of ethnic Ukrainian culture.

Russia's View of the Relationship

For Russians, the Kievan-Rus state formation (900- 1240) is a common heritage for both Russia and Ukrainians. Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, was the genesis of the Russian nation. The Russians accepted Christianity over a thousand years ago (Simes 1992), and Russians considered Kiev the mother of all Russian cities. However, the two countries were divided for 414 years (1240-1654). Ukraine became a part of Russia after signing the Treaty of Pereyaslav in 1654.

The Russian nationalists saw Pereyaslav as the culmination of a popular Ukrainian desire to reunite with Russia forever (Morrison 1993). Thus, the awakening of Ukraine and especially the separatist character of Ukrainian-ness surprised the Russian intelligentsia. In the words of Georgiy Fedotov:

we are never able to understand such type of Ukrainian behavior; this was first of all because we loved Ukraine, we loved its land, the people, its songs, and we thought that all this was also part of our national heritage. Also, the separatism was incomprehensible to us because we had never really been interested in the three to four centuries of history that had formed the Ukrainian people and their culture different from Great Russians (Bukkvoll 1997, 61).

So also, Ukraine as a separate territorial entity was unimaginable for the Russians in general and Russian nationalists in particular. In the words of Ivan Dzyuba (the Ukrainian writer), who perceptibly noted: that those who loved Ukraine most of all were the Russian nationalists such as the XIX century Slavophile Ivan Aksakov:

The Little Russian question does not exist because this is an all-Russian territorial question for the people, for the entire Russian land, concerning equally closely the inhabitant of Penza and Volhynia. Trans-Dnieper Ukraine and Byelorussia are not a conquered land that can be argued about but a part of the living body of Russia: questions and arguments have no place here (Morrison 1993, 681).

Thus Russians, who can accept the independence of Poland, Latvia, or Georgia, feel their identity threatened by the idea of Ukrainian statehood, nationality, and even linguistic autonomy (Morrison 1993). Therefore, Ukrainian independence was harder for many Russians to accept for historical, cultural, and territorial reasons. These days Ukrainians and Russians argue whether the treaty of Pereyaslav should be interpreted as only a temporary military agreement or as the natural reunification of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples.

UKRAINE-RUSSIAN RELATIONS: CONTENTIOUS ISSUES

As discussed above, Ukraine's relations with Russia in the first four years of its independent existence were fully guided by the fear factor. The unresolved contentious issues related to borders, territorial integrity, and nuclear assets further contributed to this. However, staying completely isolated from Russia was unrealistic given Ukraine's vast network of economic, political, and military links with Russia. However, the failure to sign a friendship and cooperation pact, which might have solved many bilateral difficulties, would not come to

fruition. Talks between the two sides occasionally failed and broke off owing to disagreements on various subjects. Ukraine's increasing inability to pay its energy debt also brought about tensions in the bilateral relations as Kiev became extremely troubled when Moscow leveled its gas prices with world gas prices. Apart from these issues, contradictions in their approach to various problems oscillated Ukraine Russian relations for a long time. However, both parties show interest in normalizing the relationship due to their interdependence. With the coming to power of Leonid Kuchma as President, Ukraine's Russian relations moved onto a realistic plane (Motyl 2014). As Kuchma's policies reflect his understanding of domestic dynamics and balances, he has been able to reflect his domestic successes in relations with Moscow. Ukraine's pursuit of Russian economic resources showed bright prospects and new avenues to strengthen bilateral relations. Kuchma also showed his willingness to move towards more integration with Russia and CIS. However, he strongly underlined his opposition to political and military integration, keeping Ukraine's territorial integrity. Thus, Ukraine-Russian relations again continue to evolve around the existence of contentious issues, contradictions, and interdependence. These are now discussed below.

Contentious Issues: Recognition of Ukrainian Borders

The issues of Russia and Ukraine's land and sea frontiers have remained unresolved since independence (Karácsonyi *et al.* 2015). In Kiev's opinion, all of its borders must be established following the principles of international law, which it asserts would give all borders the 'same legal status'. Moscow, in contrast, has not been willing to sign a basic treaty with Ukraine in which Russia renounces all territorial claims and the revision of frontiers. However, instead, the Russo-Ukrainian treaty of 1990 has been declared by the Russian side (unofficial so far) to be obsolete since it had been signed under completely different conditions, i.e., when the Soviet Union still existed. In the security guarantees which President of Russia Yeltsin gave to President Kravchuk during the summit in January 1993, Russia expressed its willingness to respect the frontiers of Ukraine only within the CIS frame. In other words, if Ukraine were to withdraw from the CIS someday, it would have to expect Russian territorial claims (Alexandrova 1994). Although Yeltsin reiterated the Russian willingness to guarantee the security of Ukraine during the meeting between Yeltsin and Kravchuk in June 1993, the problem continued to remain a pressing issue until the signing of the Friendship Cooperation Treaty in May 1997 (Schadlow 1992).

In terms of border recognition, the treaty was viewed as a great accomplishment for Ukrainians since article 2 of the treaty was an explicit pledge on the side of both parties to 'respect each other's territorial integrity and confirm the inviolability of the boundaries that exist between them'. Despite the apparent accomplishment, Ukrainian scholars remained skeptical of Russia's willingness to protect Ukraine's territorial integrity for various reasons, including the distinction between land and maritime border difficulties. As far as the 2063-kilometer-long land border between Ukraine and Russia was concerned, many objections were raised. Although some preliminary discussions have taken place, the actual delimitation of land borders has not occurred. The Russians rebuffed the proposals to resolve the issues on eight to ten occasions (Wolczuk 2003). Inevitably, as the issue of demarcation and delimitation was tied to the Black

Sea Fleet (BSF) status, the problems continued to exist until the BSF issue had been dealt with. As far as marine borders are concerned, an equally intractable problem has been the demarcation of the Sea of Azov and the Strait of Kerch. Ukraine insists on treating the former as a territorial sea and negotiating its delimitation separately from the issue of - the Strait of Kerch. However, the Russians rejected any moves that would remove the sea's internal status and maintained that both should be recognized as internal water of the two states (Smolansky 2004). Because Moscow believed that such a move would remove barriers to its exploitation by foreign forces (Sherr 1997). So, although negotiations were stepped up in 2002, the deadlock persists.

Contentious Issues: Status of Crimea, Sevastopol, and the Black Sea Fleet

The extremely complicated nature of the problem regarding Crimea in general, Sevastopol, and the main naval base of the Black Sea Fleet, in particular, have historical, ethnic, military-strategic, and economic importance for both countries. As Russian territorial claims and Ukrainian territorial integrity are involved therein, the Crimean question was highly volatile between the two countries right from their independence in 1991. From the late eighteenth century until 1954, Crimea was an integral part of Russia. Technically, however, it was indisputably Ukrainian territory, at least since 1954, when it was 'donated' to Ukraine by Khrushchev to mark the anniversary of Pereyaslav (Morrison 1993). This decision was also effectively validated in the referendum on independence in 1991 when Crimea voted for the independence of Ukraine. However, in the Russian parliament, both nationalists and neo-communists question its transfer to Ukraine. As most of the Russian Black Sea Fleet naval bases are located on the Crimean territory, the biggest one in Sevastopol - a city emotionally loaded for the Russians, with a history of military endeavor and sacrifice, Russians want Crimea in Toto and Sevastopol in particular along with the Black Sea Fleet based there. Thus, despite Ukraine's formal ownership of Crimea, the Russian parliament has waged a campaign to regain Crimea by disputing the validity of Ukraine's possession of the peninsula from the early days of Ukrainian independence.

In May 1992, the Russian Supreme Soviet published a resolution disputing the Soviet authorities' 1954 decision to alter Crimea's status from Russian to a Ukrainian autonomous republic. This was followed on 5 December 1992 by the adoption of the Congress of the People's Deputies of the Russian Federation, of a decision to authorize an examination of the issue of the status of Sevastopol by the Russian Supreme Soviet (Wolczuk 2003). As far as the Black Sea Fleet issue is concerned, the tussle is over flags, oaths, lines of command, and the basing rights that came with the fleet.

The initial agreement on the BSF in January 1992, in the early aftermath of the Soviet Union's disintegration, for Ukraine to absorb 30% of the BSF was never implemented since no decision on basing and territory rights was made. However, the first serious attempt to reconcile the two parties was made at a meeting in Yalta in August 1992 to prevent further damage to the already strained relations. On 1 August, Russia and Ukraine signed an agreement "on the principles of the construction of a Ukrainian Navy and the Russian Black Sea Navy based on the old Soviet Union Black Sea Fleet" (Kryukov 2006, 213). The deal exempted the BSF from CIS jurisdiction, thereby bilateralizing a technical mutual concern. However, the matter remained

dormant until a further meeting between Yeltsin and Kravchuk in June 1993, which resulted in an agreement on a fifty-fifty division to begin in September 1993, allowing Russia to continue utilizing Sevastopol as a port after 1995 (Morrison 1993). Indeed, Russia's position was so strong that, following the Massandra summit in September 1993, Yeltsin triumphantly declared that Russia would take ownership of Ukraine's share of the BSF to decrease Ukraine's gas debt to Russia. Faced with a Russian threat to cut off all supplies, Kravchuk favored selling a portion of the BSF and leasing Sevastopol to Russia (Smith 1994).

Accused of high treason by Rukh leader Chornovil, Kravchuk said, "the threat of an energy cut-off had left him with no choice: We had to act based on realism. Suppose we had slammed the door and left. The gas would have been turned off, and there would have been nothing else left to do" (Morrison 1993, 695). Furthermore, as the country's economic situation worsened during 1994, Ukraine's negotiation stance deteriorated. As a result, its claim to 50% of the fleet was significantly watered down in the Sochi treaties agreed by the two presidents on 9 June 1995. The ensuing second Sochi agreement, signed on 25 November 1995, outlined the practicalities of fleet division, the first half of which proceeded very well. Despite Ukrainian concerns about Russian behavior, the prospects for development improved, as seen by the June 1996 adoption of the new Ukrainian constitution, which included provisions for the temporary stationing of foreign military forces on Ukrainian soil.

A joint commission was established in August 1996, but the issues of finalizing contractual arrangements on the status and conditions for launching the BSF on Ukrainian territory; parameters governing the division of the fleet and its infrastructure; the allocation of Sevastopol's bays; and the term of the lease and the system of lease payments remained unresolved. On the other hand, on 28 May 1997, Ukraine and Russia announced the signing of an inter-governmental agreement settling the BSF's division, base, and cost. Three days later, on 31 May, the long-awaited inter-state treaty of friendship, cooperation, and partnership was signed (Wolczuk 2003).

On the one hand, the signing of the agreements and Russia's concessions on joint basing rights are undoubtedly significant achievements for Kiev, especially given Russia's fears that Ukraine's Crimean bases could eventually be leased out to NATO forces. However, on the other hand, the legitimization of the involvement of Russian forces on Ukrainian territory over the next twenty to twenty-five years, as well as the actual subdivision of the fleet and, most importantly, its infrastructure, are significant achievements for Kiev (Sherr 1998). Nonetheless, with the approval of the pact by the Russians and Ukrainians on 24 March 1999, the total transfer of forces from Soviet to Ukrainian control proved to be less difficult than could have been predicted. Though there were issues with nuclear forces and the BSF, the exchange of unconditional acknowledgment of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity has opened up new pathways in the Ukraine-Russia relationship.

In terms of the Black Sea Fleet's status, another agreement was made in January 2001, establishing a Ukraine-Russian command post in Sevastopol for cooperative patrol operations. Despite reciprocal promises to work toward the settlement of these fleet-related challenges, no progress has been made. In June 2002, Serhiy Pirozhkov, deputy secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, observed that Ukraine had decided to seek NATO membership. It could not permit the deployment of foreign military forces on its territory. Nevertheless, after

the Russian press reminded Kiev that the Fleet agreement was tied to the gas debt owed to Russia, the Ukrainian foreign ministry announced that Ukraine would meet all its promises regarding Russia's Black Sea Fleet (Smolansky 2004). However, the problem was played down in July 2003, when the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia Steven Pifer announced that Washington did not regard Ukraine's housing of the Russian Black Sea Fleet as an impediment to integration with NATO (Smolansky 2004).

Contentious Issues: Energy Supplies for Ukraine

As Ukraine continues to rely largely on Russia as a source of imports and a destination for its exports, contemporary Russia sees an opportunity to enhance its power and natural resources output to place political pressure on Ukraine. Due to its far larger economy than Ukraine's, Moscow has employed many methods to prevent Ukraine from reorienting itself toward its "natural" trading partners in the West. For example, Russia has attempted to use Ukraine's debt to keep the country from drifting westward. As Ukraine's debt to Russia has risen, Moscow has attempted to turn it into assets by seeking control of 'strategic' portions of Ukraine's infrastructure, such as ownership of gas pipelines and oil refineries (Wolczuk 2003). In addition, Moscow has worked hard to undermine Ukraine's efforts to attain economic independence. Because of the industrial cycle structure between Ukraine and Russia, Ukraine is particularly sensitive to this. This gives it subsidiary interests in developing a natural program of energy consumption reduction in the production and social spheres, searching for deposits of energy and natural resources on its territory, attracting foreign investment to extract these deposits, developing new mining and coal consumption technologies, and so on.

Contentious Issues: NATO Expansion

Although Russia has reluctantly accepted an initial expansion of NATO to the East, it objects to the general principle of NATO expansion, as it regards this organization as a potential enemy. Indeed, most political forces in Russia and its citizens view the partnership with NATO as relative and not as the foundation to guarantee the country's national security in the military sphere (Basse 2022). Moscow's motives in opposing NATO enlargement are also based on its geographical interests rather than on any perception of a growing military threat. Therefore, Russia's most important demand of NATO is that Ukraine and the Baltic States be recognized as a zone of Russia's vital interests (Tolstov 1997). Nevertheless, to remain away from the Russian sphere of influence, Ukraine viewed strengthening its partnership relations with NATO and with individual members of this organization to provide external assurance of national sovereignty.

CONCLUSION

From the above, it is clear that Ukrainian dealings with Russian challenges became difficult because of the country's history, its domestic realities, and its proximity to Russia. As the recent history of Ukrainian-Russian interaction suggests, the interdependence and similarity of the two Slavic countries make military confrontation, especially war, between them attainable.

Over the past years, the geopolitical perspective revealed the difficulties of Ukraine's adherence to either a Eurasian or European identity. Geographically, as Ukraine is located in Central-East Europe, bordered by Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova to the West, and by Belarus to the North-East, and with its location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, its geopolitical uniqueness is described variously by different writers as the Moscow bridge to the West, a buffer against invasion from the West, Europe's linchpin, and a strategic pivot in Europe. Thus, accepting Eurasian or European identity sets the dilemma for defining the foreign policy course. The economic perspectives, security aspects, and ethnocultural factors further contribute to this dilemma. The century-old economic dependence of Ukraine upon Russia, inhabited by many ethnic Russians and Russified Ukrainians, forced policymakers to keep all ties with Russia. On the other hand, the security aspect compelled them to develop close cooperation with the West to remain away from any possible imperialistic design of Russia to save their newly born independence.

Thus, the worst scenarios in developing Russian-Ukrainian relations have taken place because of contentious issues and contradictions. First, there has been civil disorder and insurgency in eastern Ukraine, inspired or supported by Russia. There has also been an attempt at a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Despite the aggressive rhetoric and tensions between the two countries since 1999, their unresolved differences have become fatally deadlocked.

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