



# STRATEGIC FILE

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## Understanding EU Action during “Euromaidan:” Lessons for the Next Phase

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*During Euromaidan, a lack of cohesion between Member States left the EU pursuing a basic “tipping point” approach: rather than offering Ukraine a large-scale transformation package, the EU tried to apply targeted pressure on the players involved (Moscow, Washington, Ukraine’s politicians and society), and to tip each onto a positive course. The approach was weak, and only last-minute political intervention from a trio of Member States prevented Ukraine’s wholesale descent into chaos and violent repression. Analysis of the political dynamics behind this fragmented response should, however, allow the EU to take a more coherent position, on Ukraine and in the wider region, in the future. Poland is well-placed to lead that approach.*

### I. Not a New Cold War: The Challenge of Multi-polar Transitions in the Neighbourhood

The present situation in Europe’s neighbourhood may seem like an extension of the Cold War. Western powers are locked in competition with Russia, and both the southern and eastern neighbourhoods are showing familiar signs of polarisation. In reality, though, today’s situation is as far removed from that Cold War bipolarity as it is from the U.S.-Japanese-EU triad which replaced it from 1989—and just as distant in turn from the U.S.-dominated uni-polar world that superseded that.

That means the EU is no longer expected to line up loyally behind the U.S. and take an aggressive approach towards Russia as in the Cold War. Nor is it expected to offer a comprehensive transformation and enlargement package designed rather for the 1990s, or to engage in intrusive regime change of the kind carried out in the Middle East after 2001. Bi-polarity, tri-polarity, and uni-polarity have all ceded to today’s multi-polarity and, in Ukraine just as in Syria, this requires sensitivity to the unique aspects at play in each situation.

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<sup>1</sup> The contributors provided information on the policies of the various EU Member States, and this material served as a basis for comparison. The views expressed here are the lead authors’ own, as are any errors.

Transformations such as Ukraine's must now be managed in a multi-polar context where international power is diffused between states and within them. This is a wholly new situation, and yet comparison with previous global alignments, with their heavy concentrations of power, is useful if only because it highlights just how difficult things are today. Certain stylised features of recent multi-polar transformation situations in the neighbourhood were repeated in Ukraine.

**First, the EU no longer has easy alliances in the international community.** With the U.S. in temporary or permanent withdrawal from the broader region, other powers are expected to do more. This is particularly clear when it comes to the EU and Russia's shared neighbourhood, in which U.S. interest is only further declining. In this space, marriages of convenience are replacing alliances: if the EU plays a more robust role in its own neighbourhood, this will entail a growing incongruity with U.S. interests. Moreover, it will also need to rub along with Russia. The old distinction between cooperative and competitive relationships is thus diminishing, replaced by a kind of "coopetition."

**Second, local government's leverage lies in non-cooperation.** Large powers such as Russia or the U.S. have dropped ideology for a more overtly interest-led foreign policy. As a result, countries such as Ukraine have become mere geographical spaces of relevance for reasons of security, demography and energy, rather than allegiance and loyal cooperation. Although Kyiv may thus seem to derive its international leverage by behaving like a swing state in a bi-polar world, playing value systems off against each other, it is in reality playing interests off against each other, appealing also to bidders outside its immediate proximity.

**Third, local organised politics is unlikely to offer clear partners for the EU.** With the end of global battles over ideology, Ukrainian politicians have been principally interested in asserting local norms. With the demise of east-west polarisation, the EU may find that Ukraine is "transitioning" to something other than liberal democracy, or that Ukrainians use the "right" democratic processes to elect the "wrong" people. There is thus no wholly "good" or "bad" side: Yanukovich was a democratically-elected leader, the opposition consisted of a far-right party and two major parties that are backed and trusted by only some protesters.

**Fourth, the EU does not provide the only model for local society.** The multi-polar world, with its mix of interdependence and regionalisation, was supposed to be Europe's world. And yet the EU is struggling to provide a model even for Ukraine. Its economic weight has been hit as other powers have grown; its cohesion has dissipated as Member States are tugged in different directions; and there have been signs of protectionism as the EU forms new trade alliances. Its rivals are prepared to exploit such contradictions. There are suspicions, for instance, that Russia released a recording of a tapped phone call, acting with impunity after the Five Eyes spy scandal.

All this is daunting of course. But it is only half the problem. Multi-polarity is a cocktail of diffuse power and deep interdependence. Thus the situation in Ukraine poses serious cross-border implications, but political power is simply not concentrated enough to resolve it. Individual actions taken by Russia, the United States, or Ukrainians, although not enough to resolve the situation, could easily create negative effects that ripple out across the whole region. The EU's weight is so diminished by its internal fragmentation that it cannot step in to fill the power vacuum. At best, a divided EU can mobilise these variously ambivalent and uncooperative forces, international powers, and Ukrainian politicians and society, to resolve the situation.

In light of this fragmented landscape, the Member States fell into a "tipping point" approach: they seem to have reached the assessment that the EU could not hope to offer a comprehensive package of measures which single-handedly guided Ukraine to transformation. What it could do was exert targeted pressure on the various players involved, and hope to tip each in a positive direction. Faced with the prospect of pairs of radical extremes, such as Russian incursions into Ukraine or a constructive position at the negotiating table, a U.S. pivot out of Europe or long-term consensual engagement in the region; Ukrainian unrest or stable democratic transition, the EU would try to influence the various players and point them on the right course.

## II. Mapping National Positions towards Four Tipping Points: Russia, the United States, Government, and Society

The EU may now be congratulating itself on a famous victory in Ukraine, but the situation remains incredibly fragile and the successful outcome of the February diplomatic intervention by German, Polish and French foreign ministers was no given. The tipping-point approach adopted by the EU, already a modest affair, was undermined by a lack of consensus and coherence between Member States.

**On Russia**, there was, ostensibly, scope for agreement. Most Member States viewed the situation in Ukraine primarily through the prism of relations with Russia. Most often, however, this simply came down to pragmatic economic interests. Here, the equation was simple. Bi-lateral trade volume with Russia is in most cases much more valuable than with Ukraine, and the latter has in most cases been diminishing further since the onset of the Europe-wide economic crisis.<sup>2</sup> Coupled with a very limited interest and confidence in Ukraine's democratic and European future, this inclined the majority of Member States to take a permissive position towards Russia.

This economic pragmatism pertained to a large number of small to medium-sized EU Member States that are geographically removed from the east. But it is the reluctance of the Mediterranean Member States (in particular Spain, Portugal and Italy) to antagonise Russia that is not only particularly pronounced but also most surprising. These Member States are usually assumed to be supportive of aid for Ukraine in exchange for a similar strengthening of the southern vector of the ENP. Their coolness reflects their economic weakness, which has dented their foreign policy ambitions and increased their deference to economic powers, a trend cemented by signs of a general economic withdrawal from an unstable Ukraine.

Take Italy, where bilateral trade with Ukraine shows a significant asymmetry. For Ukraine, Italy remains an important export market (in third place in 2012). For Italy, by contrast, Ukraine ranked 47<sup>th</sup> for exports in 2012 and clocked up less than 0.6% of imports.<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, Italian companies have shown an interest in the Ukrainian market ever since the Italian economy stagnated. And yet Ukraine's economic and political difficulties, coupled with capital shortfalls from the Italian side, have cooled that interest. On 24 January 2014, the Italian bank Intesa sold the Pravex Bank (Ukraine's sixth largest).<sup>4</sup> This came shortly after the UniCredit Group was reported to be on the look-out for a purchaser for the fourth largest Ukrainian bank UkrSotsBank (acquired as recently as 2008).

Although Russia also stands at the centre-point of the approach taken by countries of the Baltic and Central and Eastern European (CEE) regions, Ukraine is considered too important for them (particularly the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania and Poland) to turn a blind eye just for the sake of avoiding Moscow's disapproval. In the ranks of the CEE and Baltic states, Poland and Lithuania are clearly the feistiest in terms of readiness to ruffle feathers in Moscow. Lithuania is conducting the most confrontational policy with Russia in the entire region, despite bordering the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, a potential nest of tensions. Vilnius' robust support for the Eastern Partnership (EaP) did not dip last autumn, even in the face of a Russian embargo on Lithuanian dairy products.

Hungary's relations with Russia are deepening, particularly in the sphere of energy cooperation.<sup>5</sup> Still, the country is staunchly supportive of Ukraine's European integration and would not hesitate to act to ensure the stability of its neighbour. Its policy reflects the importance of the 150,000-strong Hungarian minority living in Transcarpathia, as well as security considerations related to shared borders. The Czech Republic too, while having no border with Ukraine, let alone a real diaspora in Ukraine, and traditionally known for its friendly-pragmatic approach to Russia (relations are mostly economic, with political talks bracketing out

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, according to Eurostat data, Finland's bilateral trade volume with Ukraine (the largest in absolute terms among all the Nordic countries) decreased by 37% between 2008 and 2012, Sweden's by 25%.

<sup>3</sup> The Observatory of Economic Complexity, <http://atlas.media.mit.edu>.

<sup>4</sup> "Intesa Sanpaolo sells Pravex-Bank, stake in Union Life," *Reuters*, 23 January 2014, [www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/23/intesasanpaolo-grouppdf-idUSL5N0KX1O620140123](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/23/intesasanpaolo-grouppdf-idUSL5N0KX1O620140123).

<sup>5</sup> Russia is the main natural gas and oil supplier for Hungary, and the country is a partner and host state of the South Stream project. Additionally, in January, Russia agreed on an €8–9.5 billion loan for the expansion of the Hungarian nuclear power plant at Paks.

democratic or humanitarian questions), is still prepared to act on behalf of its own large Ukrainian population<sup>6</sup> and dissident links.<sup>7</sup>

Yet there are significant exceptions to the trend amongst CEE states to take a robust approach to Russia, notably Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia and Slovakia. Slovenia has previously placed domestic economic interests above joint EU action when it moved to block certain person-specific sanctions imposed against Belarus in February 2012.<sup>8</sup> For its part, Visegrad member Slovakia, despite involvement in the EU's Friends of Ukraine Group, is reticent about antagonising Russia due to its traditional "Russia first" policy.<sup>9</sup> The CEE's relative cohesion as a group of states has thus rested on a familiar but brittle consensus, that Ukrainian and Russian issues should be kept separate. On this basis, Budapest felt ready to engage in Ukraine despite concerns about losing Russian investment and energy imports, and Prague could offer asylum to individuals close to Tymoshenko.

Of the larger Member States, the UK echoed the idea that the Russian and Ukrainian issues should be separated, and that the problem be solved bi-laterally between the EU and Ukraine while maintaining intense bi-lateral talks with Russia. Yet London took this stance from a global rather than a local perspective. In British thinking, engagement in Ukraine (involving support for civil society, the professionalisation of Ukraine's armed forces, and the "stronger together" campaign) is largely separate from relations with Russia (Central Asia, Afghanistan, and G20). Likewise, France viewed Ukraine in the broader context of global level cooperation with Russia, although it did not compartmentalise the two issues to the same extent. Russia's role in Ukraine echoes its policy in the southern neighbourhood, where much of France's global policy is focused.

Germany is of course the large Member State with the most advanced plan towards Ukraine and Russia. But it also stands out in that it views Ukraine as only one element in the complex web of economic and geopolitical interests that are to be discussed with Russia. Its regional thinking also takes place largely beyond the scope of the neighbourhood policy of the European Union. Russia and Germany's approaches to each other are much more peer-to-peer based as regards their regional interests or otherwise. Although Germany found itself in a lead role in dealing with Russia, it also found itself in a conceptual bind. The new government in Berlin instinctively supports the idea of engagement with Russia, but Russia, especially since Syria, is really not living up to its hopes. This marks a challenge to the tenets of German *Ostpolitik*.

**Regarding the United States**, the vast majority of EU Member States, if not all of them, interpreted firmer American engagement as a mobilising factor due to the continued centrality of the U.S. to their own foreign policies. For some, U.S. action would be an inspiring confirmation of America's mission as a global democratiser (for example, Croatia and Slovenia, following U.S. involvement in the Yugoslav wars). For others, it would simply satisfy their urge to line up behind America, viewed as the guarantor of their own security (including non-EU member Turkey). Importantly for the emergence of an active EU position, Member States otherwise rather reserved towards Ukraine due to lack of interest, but also those that are particularly nervous of antagonising Russia (for example, Slovakia and Italy), viewed the U.S. as a necessary safety net.

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<sup>6</sup> The Ukrainian diaspora living in the Czech Republic, around 125,000-strong, is the largest in the CEE region, almost three times greater than the Ukrainian community living in Poland, and almost eight times greater than the one in Hungary, despite both states bordering Ukraine.

<sup>7</sup> The First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938) was not only proud of its liberal legislation and protection of minorities and human rights, but was also the main centre for Belarusian and Ukrainian independence movements. After 1989, with former dissidents in charge, the imperative of supporting democracy in the Eastern Neighbourhood became a hallmark of Czech foreign policy. An illustrative example of this was offering asylum in 2011 to opposition members Bohdan Danylyshyn, a minister of economy in Yulia Tymoshenko's government, as well as to Tymoshenko's husband, Oleksandr, in 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Slovenia initially blocked the inclusion of Yuri Chizh, a Belarusian businessman in the energy and construction industry, in the list of EU sanctions against Belarus. While Slovenia argued that sanctions against Belarusian business people would strengthen Russia's position in the economy of Belarus, in fact the reason seems to have been to protect Slovenia's own business interests. A Slovenian company received a contract including a substantial investment, with the participation of Chizh's enterprise, for a project in Minsk. Later Slovenia withdrew the blockade and thus this move did not affect the introduction of EU sanctions.

<sup>9</sup> While this has become more moderate in recent years, the country still relies almost totally on Russian oil and natural gas imports, the price of which Slovakia is just about to renegotiate.

Yet, the Transatlantic reflex speaks of a broader weakness in the Member States' stance, this being their underlying scepticism as regards their capacity to handle Ukraine. Far from acting upon the U.S., as the tipping point approach would demand, Member States thus saw Washington as acting upon them. Predictably, the UK was a lead advocate of greater American involvement on these grounds. It argued that the EU is incapable of working out a single policy line on Ukraine, as in most cases of foreign policy. The U.S. is also the key to greater involvement by the IMF, the OSCE and the UN, a range of players considered as an important complement to the EU's own involvement in the region. And yet the UK had also expressed its own opposition to the idea of creating a government in Ukraine that overtly represented Western interests, an approach to which the U.S. seemed more open.

For other Member States (notably Belgium, Denmark, France and Sweden) the British position pointed to the well-known chicken and egg problem: UK-style reliance on the U.S. actually serves to undermine EU cohesion and engagement. And yet they, in particular France, had their own reasons for engaging with the United States. America is currently exploiting the ructions arising from its own disengagement in the EU's close region, seizing these new opportunities to resolve old conflicts (Iran, Cyprus); France is stepping in to support it, facilitating a reduction in the American burden. This pragmatic but uneasy relationship was clear during the talks on the Iranian nuclear issue, and the Franco-American tandem has emerged as an unexpected feature of today's international relations.

The perspective from Berlin has been more sceptical. Although Germany welcomes U.S. involvement in principle, the relationship has suffered in the wake of the NSA scandal (a scandal which Russia helped publicise). Chancellor Merkel's critical reaction to the tapped phone call of Victoria Nuland was thus a rebuke of "NSA-gate" and of the American official's criticism of German-favourite Vitali Klitschko. But it also expressed a deeper frustration that U.S. action was polarising the situation. Germans have hinted that, if the U.S. is indeed the catalyst for EU action, then any failings by the EU only point to the poor quality of the U.S. engagement. Washington's desire for a quick withdrawal, mirrored by Russia's desire to refocus on the Arctic and China, led to intrusive, quick-fix solutions.

For its part, the U.S. reciprocated Germany's ambivalence, lamenting that Berlin cannot be more like Paris. After all, it was Berlin that, at the Bucharest Summit of 2008, blocked NATO membership plans for Ukraine and Georgia, blunting U.S. engagement in the region. This reading makes Berlin partially responsible for the mess in Eastern Europe and further builds bridges to France. But, of course, France and Germany have very different priorities in the neighbourhood, leading one to deepen relations with the U.S., the other to maintain distance. Whereas France is looking to replace the U.S. in the southern neighbourhood, Germany is having to reach some kind of workable settlement with a Russia moving in to fill a U.S. vacuum in the east.

**On government/opposition relations**, there were also grounds for consensus. Almost all Member States agreed on the need for the EU to engage in mediation in Ukraine, usually in a roundtable format. Some, such as Spain, claimed that this should only happen if requested by all sides of the conflict, but most were more gung-ho. Yet beyond the rhetoric, the mantra of "mediation" too often spelled disengagement by the EU. Mediation acted as a kind of displacement activity in which Member States could pretend to be outside the conflict, behaving like neutral players looking in. In turn, their protestations of outsider status proved self-fulfilling. Ukrainian authorities did not see the EU as a neutral and detached player and did not call upon it to mediate.

Member States refrained from giving preference to any side, or indeed any one of the opposition leaders (a rare exception being Berlin's contact with Arseniy Yatsenyuk and German-resident Vitali Klitschko). This reticence was only partially because no opposition leader had the required capacities to sustain power (the opposition leaders were in fact the real mediators between the protesters and the government). Moreover while Member States were slow to produce positions on Yanukovych's future, most argued that pushing the democratically-elected president to the wall would be a mistake and would leave the forceful repression of the protests as his sole option (better to assure him that he could keep power until the end of his democratic mandate, or that he could run again in 2015).

With the exception of Madrid, most capitals expressed some kind of readiness to target sanctions, visa bans and asset freezes at members of the elite, should the Ukrainian authorities resort to lethal violence. Yet in practice EU states were worried that this would prove counter-productive, cutting off communication with those individuals in control in Ukraine and pushing the country into isolation. There was also scepticism

about whether individuals responsible for the bloody repression of the protests would be correctly identified. As a result, reluctant and gung-ho Member States alike were united in the view that sanctions would prove more effective when held in reserve and used as a threat. This scepticism about the effectiveness of sanctions in turn undermined the credibility of the threat; violent repression duly occurred, and the Member States effectively had the decision made for them.

Where differences of position on these matters did exist between Member States, they largely depended on the domestic understanding of the political upheavals, with many viewing it as a case of internal political turmoil that needed to be resolved by the Ukrainians themselves. Thus, the collapse of the association agreement with the EU may have been the trigger for unrest, but it really only served to highlight deeper governance problems in the country, and indicated that the EU's capacity to resolve the situation through a process of Europeanisation was limited. Others, mainly countries in the east and south-east of the EU (Bulgaria, Poland, Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Hungary) tended to view the situation rather in the context of Russia's aspirations to re-assert its influence over the post-Soviet zone and were more confident about the legitimacy of the EU to steer events.

A handful of Member States cautioned the EU to refrain from meddling in the internal politics of Ukraine for particular reasons of their own. Some (for instance Spain) can be assumed to be worried about their own political future and the prospect of the EU unwittingly bringing forth new breakaway states. Such concerns were echoed more openly by others (Slovenia and Croatia), which looked at the crisis through the lens of their own recent history, and feared the further escalation of violence. It is thus only a small group of European countries, including the UK, the V4 countries, Sweden and non-EU member Norway, that perceived the protests not just as a rejection of a local system of governance, but as a stand for broader democratic norms and European values.

**On society**, solidarity with the people of Ukraine seemed to be running high across Europe, at least at a popular and rhetorical level, which again suggests a basis for some kind of consensus. Even in countries such as Italy, where the political interest in the happenings in Ukraine is proving at best marginal, media attention and social support is said to be remarkably high. Throughout the months of crisis, several European countries saw parallel solidarity protests and many saw their own Ukrainian populations mobilise, including those in countries such as the United Kingdom, where the population is small but relatively well-organised. Moreover, Polish civil society has been busy organising aid collection actions, mainly medicine.

Yet when it comes to visa liberalisation, the primary means the EU has to draw a third country's society closer to it, popular support waned. If the mere size of the Ukrainian population were not off-putting enough, then there was the general tone of the EU debate on immigration. The UK talks of "benefit tourism" and hints that the economic disparities between east and west may be a reason to block future enlargement. Switzerland, a non-EU member, has voted to introduce quotas on EU workers, giving rise to similar calls across the bloc, including in Germany. And few Member States have an appetite to add to the 3 million large Ukrainian diaspora in the EU, especially given that they have tended to permit immigration from the east under programmes such as mobility partnerships only on the assumption that the newcomers would return home.

### **III. Mapping the Five New Clusters of Member States and Their Political Dynamics**

Far from acting on Ukraine, the above analysis illustrates how a hostile multi-polar environment acted on individual Member States, tugging them in different directions. Far from influencing Russia, the United States, the government in Kyiv, or Ukrainian society, the EU instead allowed itself to be influenced. This may seem predictable in hindsight, but prior to the crisis, the situation in the EU was actually quite cohesive, with a growing level of foreign-policy activism underpinned by clear ideas about the EU's place in the world. Indeed, it was possible to point to four relatively cohesive clusters of states in the field of EaP, each formed around a powerful voice or voices (France, the UK, Germany, Poland/Sweden), and to identify some tried-and-tested quid pro quos between them.

First, the cluster of Mediterranean states around France viewed Ukraine in the context of southern neighbourhood policy. Ukraine was seen as part of a geographical arc of instability stretching round the south and east of the EU, a state which would not join the bloc, and one likely to follow the path of southern countries in terms of muddied democratic transitions. This cluster of Member States was aware of

the parallels between Syria and Ukraine when it came to Russian meddling, and was willing to get involved in Ukraine only so long as this served to upgrade the south. It viewed the onset of global multi-polarity in terms of regionalisation (with the neighbourhood as the EU's prime locus of action), and a cooperative Transatlantic relationship as necessary as the EU moved in to replace Washington's influence in the neighbourhood.

Second, a cluster of Benelux and eastern states around Germany quietly echoed Berlin's view of international relations primarily as relations between regional hegemony, in this case Germany and Russia. Through peer-to-peer engagement, Germany aimed to reduce Moscow's threat perception, so as to allow for a more aggressive approach in support of the Ukrainian opposition and avert the threat of further escalation of violence. Despite renewed criticism of Germany's soft *Ostpolitik* (the idea that simply through German trade with Russia, Moscow will transform) since the SPD returned to power, this was a robust approach. It rested on the idea of multi-polarity as a concert of regional powers such as Germany and Russia, and the EU as Germany's sphere of influence.

Third, a cluster of Anglosphere countries around the UK, including not just Ireland but the Netherlands and some of the Nordic states, viewed the EaP in terms of the EU's economic relations. The UK has been a staunch supporter of EU enlargement and regional engagement in the past, not least as a means to expand the size of the EU's internal market. As economic disparities between the EU and its eastern neighbours grow, and the cost of integrating newcomers increases, that enthusiasm is waning. Nevertheless, these Anglosphere Member States could still be mobilised for engagement short of enlargement. As for multi-polarity, this cluster talks of a global economic race between settled and emerging powers, with the EU as a conduit for national reform and competitiveness.

Lastly, a cluster of Nordic, Baltic and eastern countries around Poland and Sweden, the progenitors of the Eastern Partnership, viewed Ukraine as a potential re-run of the democratic transitions of the 1990s, and a continuation of the EU's long engagement in the east. The EaP was not aimed against Russia in the sense of creating territorial competition. Rather, it was a case of competition over values, one in which the EU must exercise exemplary transformative power towards Ukrainian society. The focus was thus a bottom-up one, resting on the EU's residual attractiveness as a pole. In contrast to the UK, which viewed the world as a multi-polar economic race, these states perceived a largely bi-polar struggle between value-based western incumbents and mercantilist emerging powers, with the EU acting as a conduit for western-style transformation.

Clearly, this categorisation is a simplification of affairs. Not only was each cluster more heterogeneous than presented here, but the dynamics between them were more complex too. The crisis has acted on those differences, exacerbating and reorganising the dynamics underpinning them. Under the pressure of a crisis situation, the size and economic health of Member States have become more prominent in their motivation and pursuit of interests. In place of the four familiar clusters, five new blocs have become clear. Far from leading a cluster each, the EU's three large Member States sit in an exclusive category of their own. Poland and Sweden find themselves in complementary but different clubs. The Mediterranean countries have disengaged completely, alongside a range of other small and medium-sized states. And a spare south-eastern bloc is looking to be mobilised. The new clusters are as follows.

- **The geopolitical players:** this is the small cluster of large states that looks at the crisis in Ukraine through the prism of relations with Russia. But, unlike the next group (the "no-voice Europeans") it does so in terms of power-relations between large players, rather than out of a desire to protect economic interests. These Member States are mindful of Russia's weight in the broader region and in international questions such as Afghanistan, Syria, the Arctic, and climate policy. Moreover, these states view the EU in terms of its capacity to enhance or rein in their own national power. It is within this cluster, for instance, that the long-familiar compromises over the eastern and southern dimensions of the ENP now occur. Thus France would probably support an even firmer German position on Ukraine, but would expect in exchange mutual support for the political dimension of the southern part of the ENP. Germany in turn not only advocates an active EU policy towards Ukraine, but it would take the key position of quasi-mediator between the EU and Russia. The UK, although its assessment of its interests seems to have led it to downplay its close involvement in Ukraine, remains bound not least by the 1994 Budapest agreement on security assurances for the country.

➤ Germany, France and the UK

- **The no-voice Europeans:** this is the sizeable cluster of small to mid-sized states worried about jeopardising their economic relations with Russia. They have close to no direct interest in Ukraine (no shared borders or socio-historical links), but their economic ties with Russia, even if not overwhelming in absolute terms, fall in sensitive areas, be this tourism (Portugal and Spain) or energy (Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia, and Slovakia and, with the construction of the South Stream, Slovenia and Croatia too). These countries are ostensibly in favour of EU action. Denmark, for instance, demanded that it be carried out by the European External Action Service (EEAS) or on the order of Catherine Ashton herself, rather than by individual Member States. Yet their motivation is ambivalent at best. They seek to reduce their national exposure and prevent the more active Member States from excelling individually. And they prescribe caution (a mediation role at most), with some (for example Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands) seeing their own role as no more than providing support for civil society. The ambivalence of their commitment to EU action is underlined by the fact that some hint that the EU has discredited itself and should rather defer to the OSCE, whose mediation offers had been consistently turned down in Ukraine.
  - Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Latvia, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain
  
- **The crusaders:** this cluster of states has a special stake in the future of Ukraine, be that for socio-historical reasons or due to direct security-related interests emanating from a shared border with Ukraine. They thus mix normative concerns with more direct material interests. All of these countries have some minority issues with Ukraine, whether because of a large Ukrainian diaspora living on their territories (the V4, particularly the Czech Republic) or their own ethnic minority groups living in Ukraine (Poland and Hungary). These states thus have a tangible sense of the long-term interests attached to Ukraine's transformation. In everyday EU affairs, they belong to relatively coherent groups of governments which might ordinarily be mobilised (the Visegrad Four and Baltic Forum), but not all of their usual partners are as feisty as they are on EaP matters.
  - The Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania and Poland
  
- **Normative Europe:** this is the cluster of countries for whom neither the EaP nor Ukraine is bound up with existential interests, yet which are ready to stand up for democratic values and seek to spread respect for human rights as a matter of principle and with few geographic restrictions. Democracy promotion is a defining feature of many of their foreign relations and they take a rather post-modern approach to world affairs. In this cluster, Sweden is the most engaged in Ukraine, being the most visible political promoter of the EaP<sup>10</sup> and offering substantial support for democracy, as well as energy and environmental issues (on this latter agenda some €25 million annually). Yet the other, less engaged members, particularly Ireland, could be urged to undertake more support in the form of, for instance mediation or conflict management, if the situation deteriorated. With the exception of Sweden, these countries are not centrally present in the debate on the EaP, but they are each involved in the issues at hand in their own ways. Given the connection between neutrality, a concern for sovereignty, and non-membership of western organisations, members of this group are individually also structural outliers in Europe.
  - Ireland, Sweden (as well as Norway and Switzerland)
  
- **The bandwagoners:** this is the cluster of predominantly south-eastern countries unwilling to take the initiative. This, however, does not mean that they hide behind a minimal EU position. Each

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<sup>10</sup> The Swedish minister of foreign affairs, Carl Bildt, is particularly outspoken on Ukraine, often together with his Polish counterpart. This could be observed during the three months of protests and political crisis in Ukraine, on which the two ministers commented regularly and in a coordinated manner.



could be scooped up relatively easily by a coalition of Member States actually interested in a truly EU-wide response. The mobilising argument for Slovakia, for instance, would be heavy involvement determined and sustained by Germany (its prime economic partner) and by the V4. For Greece, given its European Council presidency, an effort to involve it in the crisis response would be warmly received. Romania, despite bordering Ukraine for 650 km, runs a very low-profile policy, yet it would sign up to, for instance Polish-led initiatives, not least for the 410,000 ethnic Romanians living in Northern Bucovina. Non-EU member Turkey might be ready to consider its relations with Ukraine over those with Russia in some cases, and has recently sought rapprochement with Brussels and Washington, yet the primary concern is to maintain the power balance in the Black Sea region. Obviously, Turkey would be ready to play this role only if it saw its own European integration process advanced rather than overtaken by Ukraine.

➤ Greece, Romania, Slovakia (and Turkey)

#### **IV. Conclusions: Exploiting the EU's New Internal Dynamics**

Thanks to its prominence in the small cluster of Geopolitical Players, and the weakness of the large group of No-Voice Europeans, Germany has emerged as the lead EU country, and there has naturally been some criticism of its policy. Long boasting of its transformative effect upon the east, Germany has in fact pursued regional stability and its own material interests. This pragmatism lay behind the abovementioned 2008 Bucharest decision, but also the demise of the Berlin-Kyiv government consultation format. That may now change. Faced with Russia's recalcitrance in Transnistria, Syria and now Ukraine (not to mention the prospect of greater energy independence thanks to the *Energiewende*), Germany could now take a harder line on Russia. And yet this would not resolve the flaws in the EU's approach. The problem lies less with German policy than with the fact that a single large state is dominating the bloc's foreign policy.

Rather than mobilising a large number of Member States behind a consensual and transformative approach, the EU has empowered one or two large members in pursuit of state-like qualities. In the final analysis, this approach has actually damaged the EU's capacity to act. It has reduced the range of options open to the EU, to those that are acceptable to Germany (sanctions) whilst removing from the table those measures that require more preparation and foresight (visa liberalisation, exchange programmes, redirection of unspent EU funds to the EaP); it has turned foreign policy into a gentleman's club of the Big Three (there is only limited pressure on the UK to introduce money-laundering checks on Ukrainian elites), whilst relegating smaller members; and, above all, it has encouraged Cold War-type thinking (buffer states, leverage and pivots) whilst in fact leading to the further diffusion of power. The self-defeating nature of this trend is encapsulated by a single example. Germany is attempting to act as a broker between Russia and an EU that is dominated by... Germany.

If the EU wishes to improve the coherence and weight of its response to Ukraine, and indeed to other transitions in its neighbourhood, it needs to move on from what is likely to be a repetitive and paralysing pattern, i.e., the Big Three, as the only Member States that have a sustained interest in the world outside, divide between themselves the responsibility for EU action; an alternating group of either eastern or southern crusaders mobilise due to their proximity to a particular crisis; a large bloc of no-voice members provides a highly limited permissive consensus for big-state action; an outlying group of countries around Sweden fails to live up to its normative potential; and a potentially pivotal group of south-eastern states is content to sit around waiting to be engaged.

In short, the Member States must leave behind the current situation in which divisions within the EU are imposed by a complex and fragmented external environment. And they must replace the heavy centralisation of influence around Germany (and France, should this turn into a European crisis-management situation) with a genuinely coherent response. To this end, a number of moves are required. Each entails an effort to mobilise and bring together the EU's various clusters. And in each of these moves, Poland and the V4 may prove more effective than the Big Three states interested only in forming ad hoc coalitions to supplement their clout. Taking the lead in building bridges between these disparate clusters would also allow Poland and its close partners to exploit the considerable heterogeneity of Germany, France and the UK, acting as swing states taking the EU in one direction or another.

Before approaching other Member States, however, the V4 needs to continue to boost its own cooperation. The key to increasing the results and visibility of V4 cooperation would probably be more engagement from the Czech Republic. A new government and president in Prague are actively looking for means of increasing and re-profiling the country's EU engagement. For them, Ukraine would be a good means of breaking with a Eurosceptic reputation, particularly as election outcomes elsewhere in the EU (for example, Sweden) may lead to a slight cooling of enthusiasm for the EaP. For Hungary, too, credit for EU engagement in Ukraine would be a welcome means to offset its controversial so-called 'Eastern wind' policy.<sup>11</sup> If Poland can turn these individual national efforts into a coherent V3 approach, it might even succeed in mobilising the fourth Beatle, Slovakia.

This momentum should in turn allow the V4 to pique the interest of other European countries. In the case of the EU's reticent 'No-Voice' members, the obvious starting point for the V4 is to build bridges with Mediterranean countries, which will surely demand action when the south is hit by crisis. After all, in the absence of a quid pro quo between these two blocs of Member States, the usual south versus east brokering within the ENP is being left to France and Germany. Easterners do have some basis to reach out to southerners and correct this. Southern investment in the eastern neighbourhood has gone through CEE subsidiaries; and, although direct exports from the south to Ukraine and the eastern partners are limited, those that flow via the CEE are greater. Moreover, bargains outside the ENP framework are also possible. The Spanish and Portuguese positions might shift a little in exchange for Polish support in the dialogue with Cuba.

As for other No-Voice Europeans like Slovenia, V4 mobilisation could have a limited positive effect too, as this country has previously participated in V4+ talks on Ukraine. Bulgaria, although passive on the EaP, is expecting benefits from visa liberalisation with Ukraine in terms of tourism and improved contacts with the Bulgarian minority living in Ukraine,<sup>12</sup> as is EU newcomer Croatia, which expressed strong support for Ukraine's association with the EU prior to the Vilnius summit. They might be convinced by a V4 effort to create a policy toolbox applicable both to Ukraine and the unrest in the Balkans. As for other, more distant Member States, the V4 can persuade them to at least open their chequebooks. The V4-Eastern Partnership Program (V4EaP) of the International Visegrad Fund offers a good precedent in this regard.<sup>13</sup>

As for the cluster of Bandwagoners, given their location at the southeast hinge of the EU neighbourhood, they should literally be pivotal to the ENP. Yet, these countries have few common interests, and certainly none which might allow Poland or the V4 to approach them en bloc. For Greece, mired in its own domestic difficulties, a desire for a successful EU presidency is the obvious means of stirring enthusiasm, at least in this semester. For Romania, which sees Poland as a model in foreign policy, and which has regularly been involved in V4+ format talks including on Ukraine,<sup>14</sup> a stronger call from the V4 under Polish leadership could be effective, not just to stand up for its own high stakes in Ukraine, but also to increase the profile of its own foreign policy. And, in formulating a long-term response to Ukraine, the EU might draw lessons from its experiences with Ankara. While an EU membership perspective should not be excluded for Ukraine, there might be a constructive pattern of cooperation which goes beyond the AA/DCFTA yet falls short of expedited membership negotiations.

Furthermore, given the appropriate incentive, the Normative Europeans could also emerge as a mainstay of EU action. Sweden is of course already at the forefront of the EaP. But the disparity between Stockholm and the rest of the normative cluster is indicative of an overall weakness. Not only does the European outlier status of these states marginalise them politically, they actually compete against each other. For example, for at least five years now, Swiss politicians have been talking about establishing their country as the world's lead mediator. But to establish this predominance, Bern portrays the other normative nations' membership of western organisations as a dent in their neutrality. Sweden and Austria, former neutrals, are

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<sup>11</sup> Since 2010, the FIDESZ-KDNP government in Hungary has launched a new opening towards the east (in its broad interpretation, stretching from the immediate neighbourhood to Asia and the Persian Gulf). The policy aims at increasing the attractiveness of the Hungarian economy in these regions, yet meets criticism EU-wide for championing economic cooperation over democratic considerations in the cases of cooperation with countries such as Russia, China and Azerbaijan.

<sup>12</sup> The Bulgarian minority in Ukraine lives mainly in Odessa Oblast, and is estimated to number between 240,000 and 1,000,000.

<sup>13</sup> The initial V4EaP budget of nearly €1.5 million garnered a matching contribution by the Netherlands, while Sweden and Japan also signalled their readiness to participate financially participate in the grant scheme.

<sup>14</sup> Romania, along with Bulgaria and Greece, participated in the V4 foreign ministers' meeting, dedicated to Ukrainian issues, on 24 February in Budapest.

today members of the EU, and Norway belongs to NATO, both of which are disqualifying factors in Swiss eyes. These states in turn snipe back that Switzerland not only lacks experience in intra-state mediation, but is increasingly too estranged from the EU to exert influence.

Yet, mediation today is not about deciding between competing claims in an impartial but essentially zero-sum manner; it is about transforming a situation to mutual satisfaction. Recruiting a country such as Norway to help with such transformational tasks in Ukraine could be beneficial to the V4. They enjoy more recent transformation expertise, but lack the financial heft to promote it. Moreover, individual V4 countries may be empowered by the involvement of this normative cluster. Slovakia, for instance, tries to avoid the power-politics of regional relations, concentrating on building cross-border economic infrastructure and energy links. A country like Ireland has pursued just such an apolitical and technocratic approach to its relations with the UK. Under present conditions, Slovakia's approach has become untenable, and questions such as its help in providing "reverse" energy supplies to Ukraine are heavily politicised. Normative countries might help alter this situation.

Finally, the V4 should persuade Brussels to embrace the range of other international organisations involved in the situation. The EU is a cross-national process just as much as it is a state-like player. Its strength lies in ratcheting states into transformative processes, but its weight is much diminished by the emergence of new international powers. To counteract this, it can usefully draw on other transformative players of broader reach. The OSCE, under Swiss presidency, might still have a role in Ukraine due to Russian membership, even if the organisation was not able to live up to its mediation potential. As for the IMF, while no assistance should be granted unconditionally, Member States such as the UK are right to look for scope to loosen the implementation periods, thus adjusting the offer to the fluid realities on the ground. Even NATO has proved able to exert soft normative power, as opposed to a hard power approach, encouraging continued restraint from the Ukrainian military, with which the treaty allies have links.

There has been much criticism of the fact that the EU failed to draw up a Plan B in case, as happened, Ukraine rejected the offer of closer association and descended into protests and chaos. And yet, had Yanukovich signed the association agreement in November, it may be that we would be facing virtually the same struggles and unrest. The point is rather that these muddy multipolar transformations are becoming the norm, and the EU should draw general lessons from its current experiences in Ukraine to use elsewhere in the region. The prime lesson should be obvious by now: rather than seeking to achieve reactive and ad-hoc joint positions towards external actors—the "tipping point approach"—the EU needs to build internal cohesion based on a long-term view of its place in the world.