

UKRAINE VIS-À-VIS RUSSIA AND THE EU: MISPERCEPTIONS OF FOREIGN CHALLENGES IN TIMES OF WAR, 2014–2015

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Abstract

This piece introduces a new book which examines the first year of the Russian-Ukrainian war (2014–2015) and explains the development of conflicting moments and misperceptions in EU-Ukraine-Russia relations that brought to the biggest war in Europe in the last 70 years. The book focuses on Ukraine's foreign policy and uncovers both its improvements and flaws since 1991, also touching upon Russia's aggressive policy and the EU's indecisive one in respect to Ukraine.

Text: Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 shocked the world and destroyed the European post-Second World War security architecture. Although this Russian step was unprecedented, its preconditions existed for years and the Russian-Ukrainian war has been ongoing since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Thus, to understand the seemingly irrational Russian decision to invade the neighbouring country, Ukraine's defensive strategy and the world's reaction, it would be helpful to investigate the conflict's history, in particular the beginning of the war in 2014. I offer this trip into the recent past - the analysis of EU-Ukraine-Russia interactions during the annexation of Crimea, the first months of the war in Donbas, and the Minsk I and II Peace Agreements.

The book "Ukraine Vis-à-Vis Russia and the EU: Misperceptions of Foreign Challenges in Times of War, 2014–2015" gives an opportunity to look at the first year of the Russian-Ukrainian war and reminds us of the history of Ukraine's relations with the EU and Russia

since it achieved independence in 1991. The newly independent country found itself between the European Community and Russia, the latter of which from the beginning could not fully accept losing control over Ukraine. Other post-communist countries in Eastern Europe received better chances to join the democratic Europe and Ukraine, remained a buffer zone for decades. The book focuses on Ukraine's foreign policy and shows how Ukrainian decision-makers were often playing on Ukraine's East or West integration vectors to gain their political capital. Certain issues in Ukraine's foreign policy obstructed Ukrainian leaders from forming better awareness about Ukraine's neighbours, for instance they missed the EU's unpreparedness to integrate Ukraine as fast as Ukrainians' expected, and Russia's rejection of Ukraine's independent foreign policy.

The book offers a focus on actors' perceptions and how they spark different calculi (e.g. whether to invade to protect a sphere of influence or not), which, in turn, were heating and cooling the conflict at different moments in time. This could help to avoid attributing blame to either side, and to promote a more nuanced understanding of the armed conflict of 2014–2015. The book predominantly contributes to research on foreign policy analysis and especially to literature, which focuses on foreign actors' perceptions and interactions during times of conflict, - something that has not been examined in the case of the armed Russian-Ukrainian conflict. In addition, the employment of a game theory-inspired analytical framework to Ukraine's decision-making offers an alternative usage of game theory (beyond formal modelling) in foreign policy analysis. The application of this analytical framework to the Ukrainian case is then explored empirically and tested by means of in-depth elite interviews. Altogether, 38 interviews with EU, Ukrainian and Russian policy-makers (13 Ukrainian, 16 EU, 8 Russians, and also 1 American) were conducted.

The book has examined Ukrainian policy-makers' crisis management, their perceptions of foreign

relations and their consequent interactions with their Russian and EU counterparts in the first year of the war in Ukraine (February 2014 – February 2015). The book demonstrated how the employment of the game theory-inspired analytical framework allows for the explanation of foreign policy decision-making during times of conflict. The core empirical findings uncovered the Ukrainian decision-makers' weak foreign policy analysis and poor experience in crisis management, which led to their misperceptions both about the EU's and Russia's preferences and actions. Certain drawbacks in the Ukrainian decision-makers' response to these challenging events could be explained by a number of factors. These are: pre-existing issues in Ukraine's politics (corruption amongst elites that impacted the country's preferences and resources; East-West integration fluctuations), post-revolutionary changes in power structures, the leaders' unwillingness to take responsibility for their war decisions, the unpredictable situational steps of the Russian leadership, and both the EU's and Russia's intentionally and/or unintentionally misleading signals. Following the development of Ukraine's decision-making during the whole first year of the war, the improvement of Ukraine's foreign policy can be noticed: better understanding of others' preferences, distrust in the intentions of foreign partners and certain developments of the country's resources. Thus, these findings can become a useful source for Ukraine's aim to build a more professional foreign policy.

Through this book, readers will see how misperceptions in foreign policies may bring worse outcomes for all participants. They will also discover that Ukraine, although being in a weaker position than the EU and Russia, was able to influence international relations. Unfortunately, this influence was not only a positive one due to certain unprofessionalism and corruption of Ukrainian decision-makers. However, the possibility of such a country like

Ukraine to impact its foreign relations rejects realist arguments about the world of power. This gives hope to every country, and in this particular case to Ukraine, that building strategic foreign policy, creating a functional democracy, and fighting corruption at home will result in more beneficial outcomes in foreign policy. The game theory-inspired analytical framework that was developed in this book has served as a magnifying glass to help us clearly see the decision-making process of EU, Russian and in particular Ukrainian leaders. The framework has not only revealed and explained the facts, but also revealed the misperceptions that leaders experience and the mistakes they make in their foreign policy steps during wartime. This approach to foreign policy analysis offers a comprehensive and understandable tool to uncover historical events in international relations and to check national leaders' rationality in dealing with these events. It also hints at ways to improve the foreign policy decision-making of one's country. This book provides readers with relevant facts and analysis of EU-Ukraine-Russia relations and Ukraine's foreign policy. The knowledge that readers gain, and their reflections will help in research and political activities aimed at building a secure, prosperous, and united Europe with Ukraine being an equal part of it.

All the opinions expressed in this publication are the sole view of the author, and do not represent the position of the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) or of its Members.

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Alina Nychyk defended her PhD in Politics at the University of Manchester in 2022. Previously, she received Master Degree in International Economic Relations from Wroclaw University of Economics and Bachelor Degree in International Economics from Kyiv National Economic University. As an exchange student, she has studied at Gazi University in Ankara, at Goethe University in Frankfurt on Main, and at Maastricht University.

In 2017-2018, Alina worked at the European Commission and the European Parliament. She organised a number of events to promote EU-Ukraine integration. For more than 10 years, Alina has been working for different NGOs, among them are Polish Forum of Young Diplomats, Ukraine Democracy Initiative, Promote Ukraine, Professional Government of Ukraine and recently also Young Security Conference. Alina speaks Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, English and German, and learns French.



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Her book can be ordered [here](#) or [here](#).