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**European Integration of Ukraine:
Testing Liberal Intergovernmentalism Approach**

Doctoral School of Political Science and International Relations

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Doctoral Dissertation

Anastasiia Kychak

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Table of Contents

<i>Introduction.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>1. Research Framework.....</i>	<i>15</i>
1.1. Methodology	15
1.1.1. Case Study Justification.....	15
1.1.2. Theoretical Framework	17
1.1.3. Study Variables and Hypotheses	18
1.1.4. Time Frame.....	20
1.2. Literature Review of Theories on European Integration	20
1.2.1. Liberal Intergovernmentalism	20
1.2.2. Post-functionalism.....	30
1.2.3. Neo-functionalism.....	35
1.2.4. Institutionalism.....	39
1.3. Literature Review on the European Integration of Ukraine: the Gap	42
1.4. Research Design	46
<i>2. Ukraine Between East and West: The Historical Development of Ukraine's Relations with the EU and Russia.....</i>	<i>52</i>
2.1. Ukraine in the aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR from 1991 until 2004 and its relationship with Russia and the EU.....	53
2.1.1. Economic Cooperation	54
2.1.2. Political Cooperation	56
2.1.3. Cooperation on social issues	61
2.1.4. The east-west division in Ukraine	63
2.1.5. Ukraine and the EU in the 1990s.....	66
2.2. Ukraine between the EU and Russia from 1991 until 2025.....	67
2.2.1. Ukraine's policy during the presidency of Kravchuk (1991 – 1994)	68
2.2.2. Ukraine's policy during the presidency of Kuchma (1994 – 2005)	70
2.2.3. Ukraine's policy during the presidency of Yushchenko (2005 – 2010)	73

2.2.4. Ukraine's policy during the presidency of Yanukovich (2010 – 2014)	75
2.2.5. Ukraine's policy under the presidency of Poroshenko (2014 – 2019)	79
2.2.6. Ukraine's policy during the presidency of Zelenskyi (2019 – now)	83
3. Analysis of the Orange and Euromaidan Revolutions through the Lens of European Integration Theories.....	87
3.1. Orange Revolution	88
3.1.1. National Preferences Formation	89
3.1.2. Interstate Bargaining	100
3.2.1. National Preferences Formation	113
3.2.3. Interstate Bargaining	119
3.2.4. Institutional Choice	122
4. The European integration of Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale invasion by Russia.....	131
4.1. National Preferences Formation	132
4.2. Interstate Bargaining	139
4.3. Institutional Choice	141
4.4. The Current State of Ukraine's Integration with the EU.....	145
4.4.1. Assessment of the Implementation of the Association Agreement	146
4.4.2. Status of the Implementation of the European Commission's Recommendations: Anti-Corruption Reforms	149
Conclusion.....	155
References	162

List of tables

Table 1. The Structure of the Analysis: Application of LI to the Case of Ukraine.....	51
Table 2. Comparison of pre-election campaigns of the presidents of Ukraine and their foreign policy approach	86
Table 3. Results of the presidential elections in Ukraine, 2004. Data in per cent,	89
Table 4. Difference between exit polls and official election results (1999-2014)	90
Table 5. GDP of Ukraine during 2001-2010, in millions of UAH and per cent of the previous year, at the 2021 constant prices.....	102
Table 6. GDP of Ukraine during 2012-2018, in billions of UAH and per cent of the previous year, at the 2021 constant prices	125
Table 7. What should the state policy be regarding the Russian language in Ukraine? Regional dimension	134
Table 8. GDP of Ukraine during 2012-2018, in billions of UAH and per cent of the previous year, at the 2021 constant prices	148
.....	

List of figures

Figure 1. Process tracing theory testing method.....	18
Figure 2. Study variables.....	19
Figure 3. The Three Stages of Liberal Intergovernmentalism.....	29
Figure 4. Results of the 1991 presidential elections in Ukraine.....	69
Figure 5. Results of the 1994 presidential elections in Ukraine.....	71
Figure 6. Results of the 2004 presidential re-elections in Ukraine.....	74
Figure 7. Results of the 2010 presidential elections in Ukraine.....	77
Figure 8. Results of the 2014 presidential elections in Ukraine.....	80
Figure 9. Results of the 2019 presidential elections in Ukraine.....	84
Figure 10. To what extent do the results of the second round of elections reflect the will of the voters? Data in per cent, November 2004.....	91

Figure 11. Should the new president continue Kuchma's policies or make a radical change? Data in per cent, September 2004.....	92
Figure 12. Percentage of people who answered “I strongly agree” with the opinion that “democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government” (data in per cent)	93
Figure 13. Which one of the leading presidential candidates can bring Ukraine closer to joining the EU? Data in per cent, July 2004.....	94
Figure 15. Ukraine's foreign trade in goods with EU countries in 2004 – 2010, millions of US dollars.....	104
Figure 16. How beneficial will the signing of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union be for Ukraine in these specific areas?	114
Figure 17: Public Opinion on whether Ukraine Should Join the EU.....	115
Figure 18. Ukraine's foreign trade in goods with EU countries in 2011 – 2019, millions of US dollars	124
Figure 19. What should the state policy be regarding the Russian language in Ukraine?	133
Figure 20. Motives for Ukraine's membership in the EU.....	135
Figure 21. Ukraine's foreign trade in goods with EU countries in 2018 – 2023, millions of US dollars.....	147
Figure 22. Trends of the FDI from the EU countries to Ukraine (USD, million), and its share of the total FDI to Ukraine (per cent)	149

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INTRODUCTION

Ukraine's relations with the European Union represent a unique case for European integration studies, especially in light of its recent application for EU membership. Despite serious challenges such as the war with Russia, political instability and economic difficulties, Ukraine's integration with the EU continues to strengthen. This dissertation aims to identify the key motivations driving Ukraine's integration with the EU at both the governmental and societal levels.

The dissertation employs the theoretical framework of Liberal Intergovernmentalism (LI) (see especially Moravcsik, 1993, 1998) to analyse how Ukraine developed its preferences for EU integration. The framework of Liberal Intergovernmentalism has been widely used to analyse EU integration, including agreements with third countries such as the EU-ACP Cotonou Agreement (Forwood, 2001), Euro-Mediterranean agreements (Montanari, 2007b), and Eastern Enlargement (Moravcsik & Vachudova, 2003; Schimmelfennig, 2001). Forwood (2001) analysed how domestic interests influence international negotiations and considered the implications for future negotiations between the EU and regional ACP groups. Montanari (2007b) used the 'two-level game' approach, analysing two levels: the domestic level, involving groups with conflicting interests within countries, and the international level, focusing on state interactions. This framework is applied to analyse the evolution of Euro-Mediterranean bilateral trade. However, the model in this article focuses specifically on the EU side. Both Forwood (2001) and Montanari (2007b) applied the LI framework in its earlier form (Moravcsik, 1993, 1998) before Moravcsik operationalised the third (institutional) level of analysis. Moravcsik and Vachudova (2003) analysed national interests and states' bargaining power within the framework of Liberal Intergovernmentalism, with a particular focus on Eastern Enlargement. They examine the interests and state power of both EU member states and candidate countries, providing insights into the dynamics of this enlargement process. Schimmelfennig (2001) examines the EU's decision to

pursue eastward enlargement using the principles of Liberal Intergovernmentalism. While arguing that LI alone cannot fully explain why these countries were granted full membership, the author suggests that a sociological perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of this development.

The LI framework has also examined the EU's relations with candidate countries, including Turkey (Tsarouhas, 2021) and the Western Balkans (Kalemaj, 2015). Tsarouhas (2021) applies this framework to EU-Turkey relations, examining key neoliberal principles, LI's three-stage integration approach, and various forms of cooperation, including the customs union, Turkey's EU membership bid, and the EU-Turkey migration agreement. Kalemaj (2015) analyses the EU's policy towards the western Balkans, using Liberal Intergovernmentalism and neo-functionalism to explore why the enlargement process has stalled and lacks a clear future. This literature demonstrates the usefulness of a Liberal intergovernmental mechanism for explaining European integration processes. At the same time, most of the literature has been written from the perspective of the EU because it represents superior bargaining power, and therefore, most scholars find it more compelling to understand the reasons for EU decision-making. This thesis will apply LI to analyse Ukraine's national interests and bargaining power in its European integration process.

There is limited research applying the Liberal Intergovernmentalism framework to the case of Ukraine. Montanari (2007a) used this framework to explore Ukraine's potential integration with the EU, analysing three scenarios: a free trade area, a fully developed European Neighbourhood Policy and EU accession. This article provides a valuable example of how LI theory can enhance the understanding of Ukraine's European integration, particularly by analysing the process from the Ukrainian perspective. However, it was written after the Orange Revolution and does not take into account significant developments in EU-Ukraine relations, such as the Euromaidan, the signing of the Association Agreement, and Ukraine's subsequent acquisition of EU candidate status in the context of Russian aggression, which this dissertation will address.

Several articles examine the EU's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine through the lens of Liberal Intergovernmentalism. Moravcsik and Emmons (2021) demonstrate the application of the Liberal intergovernmental mechanism to EU external action, using the EU's response to Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine as a case study. Fink and Kader (2023) applied Liberal Intergovernmentalism to examine the EU's decision to activate Directive 2001/55/EC, a directive never used before, to grant temporary protection to Ukrainian refugees during the 2022 crisis. Börzel (2023) applies Liberal Intergovernmentalism to examine the EU's response to Russia's war on Ukraine, concluding that identity politics is a key factor in the integration process. These articles discuss how Liberal Intergovernmentalism explains the EU's response and policy after Russia's invasions - one focuses on the aftermath of 2014, the other two on 2022. This dissertation applies the LI framework to analyse Ukraine's interests at stake and its policy towards the EU in response to Russia's aggression in both 2014 and 2022.

Thus, research on the application of Liberal Intergovernmentalism to the case of Ukraine remains limited, with most works focusing primarily on analysing the EU's integration policy towards Ukraine (Börzel, 2023; Fink & Kader, 2023; Moravcsik & Emmons, 2021). This study aims to apply LI to identify key preferences for Ukraine's EU membership aspirations and examine how these motivations are translated into policy and practice.

The main research question: to what extent can Liberal Intergovernmentalism account for the European Integration of Ukraine?

Within this question, the thesis will investigate:

1. Whether the three-stage causal mechanism exists and functions, as theorised by Liberal Intergovernmentalism, in understanding the process of European integration of Ukraine;
2. What is the impact of the leading domestic actors' preferences (particularly society and political elites) on the process of European integration of Ukraine, and whether these actors' preferences are interdependent?

By answering this question, this dissertation aims to explore the factors driving Ukraine's European choice. A key focus is to understand why Ukrainians, at both public and governmental levels, continue to support European integration despite the significant costs - notably the ongoing war with Russia. To achieve this goal, the following tasks will be solved:

- carry out a historical contextualisation of the case study: study Ukraine's relations with the EU and Russia since 1991;
- examine Russia's role in shaping Ukraine's European integration path;
- study how presidential transitions have influenced Ukraine's foreign policy and public opinion on EU integration;
- evaluate key events (Orange Revolution, Euromaidan, post-2022 invasion) utilising theories of European integration;
- apply the framework of Liberal Intergovernmentalism to structure the analysis: evaluate national preference formation, intergovernmental bargaining and institutionalisation in Ukraine's European integration process;
- assess Ukraine's current EU integration and progress towards potential membership.

The novelty of this study is that it applies the framework of Liberal Intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik, 1993, 1998) to the analysis of a candidate state, using Ukraine as a case study and examining the integration process from Ukraine's perspective rather than the EU's. This perspective has not been explored before. This provides a unique opportunity to assess how the theory can be applied to shape the preferences of a candidate state and to evaluate its relevance and applicability in such cases.

This dissertation is structured as follows. The first chapter presents the research framework of the thesis, formulates the main hypothesis, and defines the study variables. It also reviews the principal theories of European integration and assesses their relevance to Ukraine's integration into the European Union. It provides an in-depth analysis of Liberal Intergovernmentalism as the primary theoretical framework, followed by a

review of three additional theories of European integration, Post-functionalism, Neo-functionalism and Institutionalism, to evaluate their potential applicability to the Ukrainian case. The chapter also surveys the literature on EU–Ukraine relations, including studies of public opinion on EU membership and the institutional development of cooperation through the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), the Association Agreement and Ukraine’s pursuit of EU candidate status. It concludes by outlining the research design and explaining how the selected theories are applied in the subsequent analysis.

The second chapter provides a historical overview of Ukraine’s relations with the European Union and Russia from 1991 to the present. It examines how Ukraine’s Soviet legacy shaped these relationships, with particular attention to Russia’s influence after the Soviet Union’s collapse, including its role in the Orange and Euromaidan revolutions and its impact on Ukraine’s European orientation. Structured chronologically around successive presidencies, the chapter places limited emphasis on the early post-independence period and focuses primarily on developments since 2004. It analyses electoral dynamics, the evolving East–West divide, and the use of identity and language issues in domestic politics. The chapter also traces shifts in foreign policy under different presidents, highlighting how leadership changes affected Ukraine’s approach to the EU and Russia. Overall, it establishes the historical context for Ukraine’s European choice and prepares the ground for the subsequent analysis.

The third chapter analyses Ukraine’s integration into the European Union through the lens of European integration theory. Concentrating on two pivotal moments, the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan Revolution, it traces the development of Ukraine’s European trajectory using Liberal Intergovernmentalism as the principal analytical framework. The chapter is structured around the theory’s three stages: national preference formation, intergovernmental bargaining and institutionalisation.

The fourth chapter evaluates Ukraine’s current stage of integration into the European Union, with particular emphasis on developments since

Russia's full-scale invasion. It examines the deepening institutional framework of EU–Ukraine relations and the country's progress towards further integration and prospective membership.

1. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

1.1. Methodology

1.1.1. Case Study Justification

The choice of Ukraine as a case study in this research, which focuses on its path to integration into the European Union through the prism of a Liberal intergovernmental mechanism, is essential and relevant for several reasons.

First, Ukraine's geographic location between Russia and the European Union makes its European integration process a unique and important example for understanding the broader dynamics of EU enlargement. Since 2004, Ukraine has pursued integration with the European Union. At the same time, Ukraine's aspirations to join European institutions have become a key challenge to Russian influence in the region, providing a rich context for studying the interplay between the formation of Ukrainian national preferences, international negotiations with Russia and the EU, and institutional arrangements with them.

Second, the Ukrainian case is also historically significant because Ukraine's European integration has been a long process and has been marked by two important events: the Orange Revolution (2004) and the subsequent Euromaidan (2013-2014), both of which reflected public demands for rapprochement with Europe. After Euromaidan, Ukraine's choice in favour of Europe became apparent, leading to the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war. But despite serious challenges such as the war with Russia, political instability, and economic difficulties, Ukraine's integration with the EU continues to strengthen, raising the question of why Ukraine remains steadfast in its

European choice despite the political and humanitarian consequences for the country.

Moreover, Ukraine's relations with the European Union represent an interesting case for European integration studies, especially in light of its recent application for EU membership. Studying Ukraine through Liberal Intergovernmentalism allows an in-depth examination of how domestic preferences align with interstate negotiations and shape the integration process. The central role of Ukrainian society and political elites in shaping foreign policy and national preferences makes it an ideal case to apply Liberal Intergovernmentalism, which emphasises the influence of domestic political processes on international negotiations (Moravcsik, 2020). Given the limited application of this theory to candidate countries, the case of Ukraine offers a valuable opportunity to assess its relevance and practicality in this context.

In addition, the internal divisions in Ukraine - between pro-European and pro-Russian factions and their exploitation of language differences, which in turn has widened the gap between the eastern and western parts of the country, including their foreign policy preferences - provide an interesting dimension for studying the role of national identity and political elites in shaping foreign policy.

In sum, Ukraine's ongoing path towards European integration, especially after the Russian invasion in February 2022, makes it a timely and relevant case study for examining the broader mechanisms of EU enlargement. The choice of Ukraine as a case study provides an opportunity to apply Liberal Intergovernmentalism to the complex context of a candidate country's integration process, which includes domestic political forces, civil society, international negotiations, and regional security concerns. By focusing on Ukraine, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of European integration, especially from the perspective of candidate countries.

1.1.2. Theoretical Framework

The dissertation uses a within-case design to analyse Ukraine's integration into the EU, employing process tracing as its primary analytical method. This approach is used to uncover the underlying causal mechanisms within a single case study (Beach & Pedersen, 2013). To study the process of Ukraine's European integration, this thesis will focus on a series of significant events: the Orange Revolution of 2004, the Euromaidan Revolution of 2013-2014, and the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Employing a qualitative analysis, the study aims to explore and interpret the underlying motivations driving Ukraine's European integration.

The research adopts a deductive approach and applies theory testing to assess whether Ukraine's national priorities concerning European integration are consistent with the principles of Liberal Intergovernmentalism. Process tracing theory testing derives a theory from the existing literature and tests whether the evidence supports each aspect of the hypothesis. It identifies causal mechanisms by examining whether they functioned as expected in the case and assessing their overall presence (Beach & Pedersen, 2013). It is pretty standard for research on European integration to use the process-tracing method, which Schimmelfennig (2014a) identifies as a key approach in many studies in this area. He argues that theory testing should focus on how interdependence and government preferences evolve and shape outcomes in a precise causal sequence. Consequently, process tracing is essential for theoretical insights and methodological accuracy in analysing European integration.

Following this approach, the thesis will derive a hypothesis from LI theory and test whether the evidence from the case of Ukraine supports the proposed causal mechanisms. Within this framework, the literature review will first provide the theoretical foundation, followed by a historical contextualisation of the case study. A process-tracing analysis will then complement this to examine the course of EU integration in the case of Ukraine.

Utilising process tracing, following the template provided by Schimmelfennig (2014a), this research will identify:

1. The relevant actors involved,
2. The formation of their beliefs and preferences,
3. How do these preferences shape their actions,
4. How the individual actions of multiple actors are combined to produce the collective outcome.

1.1.3. Study Variables and Hypotheses

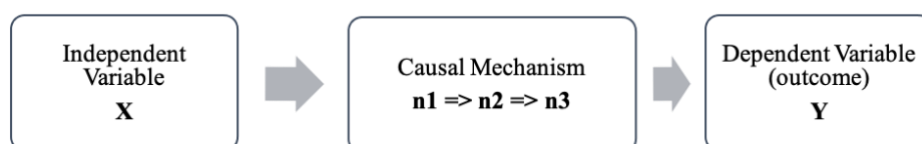
Based on the review of the literature, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

Hypothesis 1: The causal mechanisms proposed by LI can fully account for the case of Ukraine, where national preferences play an important role in shaping the state's foreign policy and the regional integration process.

Hypothesis 2: A political leader's (political party's) rhetoric and identity politics are expected to strongly influence the formation of public opinion about the EU in Ukraine.

Because the thesis uses the process tracing method, it goes beyond simply identifying the independent and dependent variables. It seeks to identify the intervening causal process - the causal chain and mechanism - that links an independent variable (or variables) to the outcome of the dependent variable (Beach & Pedersen, 2013).

Figure 1. Process tracing theory testing method



Source: own construction based on Beach & Pedersen (2013)

Consequently, the *dependent variable* is perceptions of Ukraine's European integration.

The independent variable 1: society's preferences

The independent variable 2: preferences of the political elite (presidents, political parties)

Causal force 1 (n1): national preferences. The main domestic actors' preferences shape national preferences.

Causal force 2 (n2): the preferences and bargaining power of Ukraine, as well as other international actors (EU, Russia)

Causal force 3 (n3): the outcome of interstate negotiations (Association Agreement, DCFTA, level of fulfilment of Copenhagen criteria)

Figure 2. Study variables



Source: own construction

1.1.4. Time Frame

A long-time perspective allows for the most valid evaluation of the character of the European integration of Ukraine and its shift over time. Thus, the theoretical section will focus on the period from Ukraine's independence in 1991 to the present to provide historical background and highlight the historical and cultural reasons for the complexity of the formation of national preferences regarding Ukraine's European integration. The analytical section, however, will focus on three major events: the Orange Revolution, the Euromaidan Revolution, and the Russian invasion of 2022. The emphasis on these events is crucial because profound shifts in the preferences of mass and political elites occurred during these critical moments in Ukraine's modern history.

1.2. Literature Review of Theories on European Integration

1.2.1. Liberal Intergovernmentalism

Liberal Intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik, 1993, 1995, 1998) is a baseline theory in the study of regional integration established by Andrew Moravcsik in his 1998 book “The Choice for Europe”. LI draws on broader social science theory, seeks to modernise integrational theory, and applies “rationalist institutionalism” (an approach to studying interstate cooperation in world politics). LI is a framework that aims to explain regional integration by linking multiple theories and factors into a single, coherent approach and to trace the trajectory of integration over time (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2018).

The framework posits that the nation-state is the primary political instrument through which individuals and groups in civil society seek to influence international negotiations. First, Liberal Intergovernmentalism sees states as unitary actors in international negotiations, striving to achieve specific goals through interstate bargaining. This does not, however, mean that states are unitary in their domestic policies. Instead, LI treats states as

representative institutions that mediate between domestic interests and international objectives. National preferences and interests are shaped primarily by domestic interest groups and voting blocs, which are influenced by broader social, economic and cultural interdependencies. These patterns of interdependence, mainly external to state behaviour, drive domestic groups' demands for state policies that manage issue-specific transnational interdependence in ways that benefit them. Governments, influenced by their political and economic institutions, prioritise these domestic preferences to remain in power. As social interdependence is dynamic and varies across countries, time and issues, national preferences evolve accordingly. Moreover, interdependence is shaped by transnational social and economic groups, meaning its constraints are beyond the direct control of a single state or its domestic actors (Moravcsik, 2020). The unitary state assumption differs from the "realist" perspective in several key respects: national security is not the primary driver, power capabilities do not solely define state power, state preferences aren't uniform, and interstate institutions still matter. Liberal Intergovernmentalism recognises a key reality of modern institutions such as the EU: member states retain significant decision-making power and political legitimacy (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2018).

Second, the theory assumes that states are rational actors. They evaluate alternatives and choose the one that maximises their utility. Thus, creating international agreements or institutions is seen as the collective result of rational state choices and intergovernmental negotiations. The rationality of states means that each negotiation is shaped by domestic political systems that generate stable, prioritised goals that governments pursue with maximum efficiency. Hence, in this framework, states are central in shaping integration solutions through intergovernmental processes (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2018).

This framework applies to any form of (economic) integration, not just the European Union. It is parsimonious but multi-causal rather than mono-causal. The framework suggests that international negotiations can be broken down into three stages: national preference formation, interstate bargaining and institutional choice. Each stage is distinct and is explained by a different

theory: a 'Liberal' or societal theory for national preference formation, a bargaining theory for international negotiations, and a functional theory for institutional choice (Moravcsik, 1998).

National Preferences: First, LI suggests that states formulate "national preferences" to identify their primary goals, policies, and tactics (Moravcsik, 1993). Since states are considered rational actors, it is assumed that European integration resulted from a series of rational choices made by national leaders who consistently pursued economic interests, primarily commercial interests. State preferences are neither fixed nor uniform: they vary among states and within the same state. There is no hierarchy of interests; national interests tend to reflect direct, issue-specific consequences (Moravcsik, 1998). LI rejects traditional views of national preferences as subordinate to a single overarching goal. Instead, it argues that the primary source of these preferences lies in the immediate or anticipated demands of influential subnational actors who seek to regulate transnational interdependence in specific ways. These demands evolve in response to external shocks or independent shifts in economic, cultural, or social interdependence. Politicians within national institutions then aggregate and filter these demands, inevitably prioritising some over others (Moravcsik & Emmons, 2021).

National preferences for and against European integration can generally be understood as two broad motivations: economic and geopolitical interests. Economic preferences, particularly concerning international trade and monetary policy, often reflect incentives arising from patterns of global economic interdependence. Geopolitical interests, on the other hand, stem from concerns about national sovereignty or territorial integrity. LI focuses primarily on the economic aspects of the integration. The theory suggests that domestic social actors influence economic policy more than foreign and security policy. However, these preferences may vary depending on the specific issue, country or time. Member states adjust their strategies over time to maximise the benefits of integration (Moravcsik, 1998). LI argues that geopolitical concerns, while secondary, can still play an important role.

Governments often develop national strategies incorporating geopolitical concerns into basic economic calculations (Moravcsik, 2020).

Hence, the theory of Liberal Intergovernmentalism implies that national interests shape the governments' preferences on European integration and vary according to the issue at hand. These preferences emerge from a domestic decision-making process and aim to increase and maximise national welfare in specific areas. This distinguishes LI from other integration theories because preferences are considered exogenous to integration; moreover, they are driven by critical interdependence, whether positive or negative. In situations of negative international interdependence, states are more likely to favour further integration over disintegration or maintaining the status quo to avoid welfare losses (Schimmelfennig, 2015).

Substantive bargains: The second stage of LI suggests that states engage in bargaining to improve the efficiency of a collectively suboptimal situation to their mutual benefit. However, they almost always face the challenge of determining how to distribute the resulting gains and losses (Moravcsik & Emmons, 2021). LI uses a bargaining theory of international cooperation to explain the outcomes of international negotiations between states with different national preferences. Intergovernmental bargaining theory is based on three assumptions. First, treaty change negotiations take place in a non-coercive, unanimity-based system, where governments can reject agreements that would leave them worse off than pursuing unilateral policies. Second, the transaction costs of information gathering are relatively low compared to the benefits of intergovernmental cooperation. Thirdly, it is argued that the outcome of international negotiations is determined by the relative bargaining power of the actors involved (Moravcsik, 1998). States' preferences are assumed to be positive-sum: all countries will benefit from the agreement. Bargaining power in international politics results from many factors, including asymmetrical interdependence and information about preferences. Actors who are least dependent on a particular agreement are in the strongest position to threaten non-cooperation, compelling others to make concessions. Moreover, those with more and better information about the preferences of other actors and how institutions work use this knowledge to manipulate

outcomes in their favour (Moravcsik, 1998). It is also argued that asymmetric interdependence is often related to size. Smaller, more interdependent states are generally more vulnerable. In contrast, larger, more powerful states usually have leverage through options such as offering votes, funding, or political concessions to secure agreement on specific issues (Moravcsik & Emmons, 2021). In contrast to neo-functionalism, LI argues that entrepreneurs usually fail to reach effective interstate agreements because they rarely have information or experience that the state does not have, while governments typically have sufficient incentive, expertise and resources to bargain efficiently (Moravcsik, 2018).

If the core assumptions of intergovernmental bargaining theory hold, negotiated outcomes are influenced by three key factors: (1) Unilateral alternatives: the power to veto or withdraw from an agreement is crucial. Governments with limited unilateral alternatives have less bargaining power and must make more concessions. (2) Coalition alternatives: the ability to form alternative coalitions strengthens bargaining positions for its members. Coalition policies will likely create more severe negative policy externalities than single-state policies. Consequently, the real threat of exclusion will likely generate even greater pressure on recalcitrant states than a state of dissent. (3) Linkage and side payments: Linkage occurs when governments have different preference incentives on different issues, with some gaining more from certain areas than from others. Issue linkage tends to be most beneficial when two countries have significantly different interests in different issues. However, the major constraint on linkage strategies lies in domestic complications, as linked concessions often create domestic losers. Therefore, linkage can be expected to manifest financial side payments (wealthy governments have an advantage) or symbolic concessions regarding the design of institutions (Moravcsik, 1998).

Thus, LI posits that key political intermediary states operate in an 'anarchic' environment during the integration process with no central authority to make or enforce decisions. In this context, governments pursue their objectives primarily through intergovernmental negotiation and bargaining, sometimes within and sometimes outside formal rules.

Consequently, the EU and similar regional institutions should not be seen as proto-states but as 'international regimes' designed to coordinate the policies of nation-states. The EU is not the world's weakest example of a federal state but its most ambitious and successful example of an international organisation (Moravcsik, 2020).

Institutional choice: Once states reach consensus on a basic policy, LI assumes they move to a third stage in which they decide whether and how to pool and delegate authority to institutions. The theory posits that supranational bodies are agents of nation-states rather than autonomous actors. Therefore, the development of integration depends only on national preferences and decisions taken at interstate meetings (Moravcsik, 1998). However, the shape of the institutional design would broadly reflect the preferences of states with superior bargaining power (Schimmelfennig, 2015). In this stage, LI draws primarily on international regime theory, which views international institutions as instruments that help states execute, design, enforce, and maintain incomplete contracts in the face of uncertainty (Moravcsik, 2018, p.1654). According to Liberal Intergovernmentalism, international institutions are often crucial for fostering long-term cooperation. They enable states to achieve collectively beneficial outcomes by reducing the transaction costs of bargaining and providing the information necessary to reduce uncertainty about each other's future preferences. While European integration is sometimes seen as a challenge to LI, it is, in fact, a key component of the theory. LI argues that European integration does not seek to replace the nation-state but adapts it to the pressures of globalisation (seen as an externality). Moreover, day-to-day legislative decisions, evolving policies and informal rules reflect states' preferences, power dynamics and credible commitments (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2018).

Pooling and delegation in EU institutions vary according to national governments' issue-specific concerns about each other's future intentions and capacity to develop, implement, and extend existing deals (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2018). According to LI, there are three credible explanations for the delegation and pooling of sovereignty in the context of the EU: belief in federalist ideology, the need for centralised technocratic

coordination and planning, and the desire for more plausible commitments. The extent to which governments advocate the devolution of powers to supranational organisations depends on the importance they attach to the issues and outcomes at stake, as well as their uncertainty about other governments' future actions (Moravcsik, 1998). Some institutional procedures in the EU do simply establish general norms, standards and procedures. In such cases, LI supposes that governments will pool decisions in co-decision fora – such as “standard-setting” decisions - where it is advantageous to reduce the transaction costs of reaching common agreements. Many EU institutions use more advanced forms of delegation or pooling, such as qualified majority voting in the Council, agenda-setting by the European Council and the Commission, the EP's joint decision-making powers, the CAP structure, and some functions of the European Central Bank (Moravcsik, 2018). By handing over sovereignty to international institutions, governments effectively address the challenges posed by domestic policy influences and decentralised intergovernmental control, which can increase pressure on non-compliance when the costs to influential domestic players are high (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2018).

According to the framework, states deliberately make decisions that formally limit their autonomy to maintain power and benefit from emerging transnational relations. Indeed, within the structure of the established integration institutions, states gain additional benefits and widen their foreign policy options, as well as access to information that would otherwise be unavailable. However, this also means that EU institutions cannot alter states' interests and preferences (Moravcsik, 1998).

Liberal Intergovernmentalism: External Actions and Enlargement

LI provides a theoretical framework for analysing EU external action. As a bottom-up theory, LI suggests that the foreign policy objectives of national governments evolve in response to changing pressures from domestic social groups whose preferences are channelled through political institutions (Moravcsik, 1993). It is assumed that an "issue-specific" theory may ignore commercial interests or be entirely dominated by other concerns in a non-

economic foreign policy. It is argued that the reluctance of certain states to join the EU is an example of this "ideational Liberal" dynamic, in which policy is motivated at least as much by persistent issue-specific identity concerns as by economic ones. Norway and Switzerland are examples of countries that have access to and benefit from the EU single market without being EU members - Norway through the EEA and Switzerland through bilateral agreements for specific sectors (Gstöhl, 2002). Preferences are less certain in areas where the stakes are small, uncertain, and far in the future and where governments cannot calculate the consequences. This is often the case in foreign and security policy, which involves managing relatively small risks posed by distant, uncertain future threats to public welfare. A key example is Finland and Sweden's initial reluctance to join NATO. Their position changed after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which highlighted the long-term security benefits of NATO membership in the face of a more immediate and tangible threat. LI argues that states are unlikely to defer to EU actors in most areas of EU external action, as they typically have strong state capacities, skilled bureaucracies and, in many cases, well-informed national interest groups. LI suggests that states may have different preferences in areas such as security and often show indifference to particular outcomes. It predicts that ad hoc coalitions of the willing, possibly using the EU as a framework for consultation, may be more responsive to state interests than centralised policy (Moravcsik & Emmons, 2021).

Moravcsik and Emmons (2021) argue that the success of EU policies should be judged by the realistic goals of member states, not by idealistic or technocratic standards. Critics often judge the EU's external action by its degree of centralisation or its ability to solve global problems rather than its effectiveness in exploiting opportunities. Failure to achieve goals is usually due to a lack of common goals among states or to the fact that these goals cannot be achieved at a reasonable cost, rather than to a failure to centralise power in the EU.

Theoretical criticism and limitations of LI

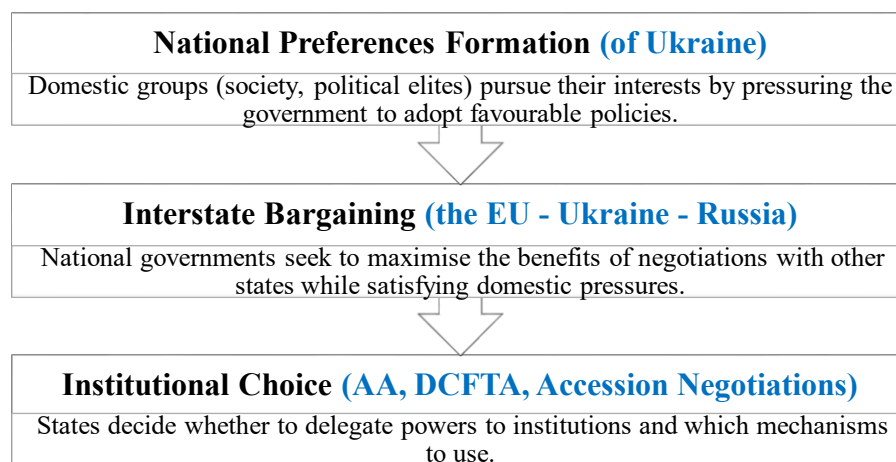
LI faces criticism from rational-choice institutionalists, who argue it fails to account for the day-to-day decision-making process. While this criticism is partly valid, it is exaggerated. Indeed, LI works best when decision-making occurs in a decentralised environment following the unanimity requirement. However, recent empirical studies show that the LI theory is much more applicable than is generally assumed, including everyday decision-making in the EU. This is because many decisions in the EU are taken by de facto consensus or unanimity, even when formal rules suggest otherwise. Secondly, historical institutionalists argue that LI focuses only on intended decisions and neglects unintended consequences. However, LI can explain such cases, consider the undesirable outcomes, and even assume their existence. International institutions would not need to elaborate on 'incomplete contacts' without unforeseen consequences. The purpose of institutions is to formulate agreements and ensure a credible commitment to compliance, thereby preventing future defections by dissatisfied governments (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2018).

LI is not a universal theory. It explains integration in most situations, but not in cases that contradict its assumptions about preferences, bargaining and plausible commitments. Hence, LI has limitations: First, LI best explains policy-making in problem domains where social preferences are relatively valid and clearly specified. Moreover, some decisions have complex social and economic consequences that are difficult to assess. For example, there are gaps in explaining policies such as euro reforms, EU enlargement, institutional delegation (e.g., to the European Parliament), and the detailed implementation and judicial decision-making processes (e.g., by the European Court of Justice) (Moravcsik, 2020). Second, intergovernmental bargaining based on asymmetric interdependence prevails in negotiations between states, except in rare cases of high transaction costs and asymmetric information, where supranational entrepreneurs may have influence.

Furthermore, LI has some limitations when studying public opinion on integration. Postfunctionalists argue that LI overlooks public opinion by

assuming that governments, rather than voters, drive European integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2007). However, this claim is not entirely accurate. Moravcsik (2020) argues that since governments are primarily interested in maintaining power, a theory of national preferences must take into account mass preferences, especially in areas where social interests in interdependence are both intense and widely shared. Furthermore, Postfunctionalists criticise LI's focus on issue-specific interests, contending that the increasing prominence of European integration in domestic politics is fueled not just by economic concerns but also by issues of identity (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). In particular, Börzel and Risse (2018) claim that LI fails to address identity-based Euroscepticism because it takes identities as given and exogenous to its main causal mechanisms. This limitation of LI is particularly critical for this thesis, as identity politics play a significant role in Ukraine's decision to pursue European integration. Moravcsik (1998) also argues that geopolitical and ideological motivations are secondary and arise mainly when the distribution of economic benefits is uncertain. Thus, LI generally assumes that economic interests outweigh geopolitical and ideological ones. However, this assumption does not fully apply to Ukraine, where geopolitics and identity politics significantly shape EU integration preferences.

Figure 3. The Three Stages of Liberal Intergovernmentalism



Source: own construction

Figure 3 above summarises how the three stages of Liberal Intergovernmentalism will be applied to the analysis of the Ukrainian case study. The framework will be used to examine the three main events in the

contemporary history of Ukraine – the Orange Revolution, the Euromaidan Revolution, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The research first identifies the relevant actors involved, then studies the formation of their preferences and how they shape their actions during interstate negotiations (both with the EU and Russia), and finally analyses how these actions produce the collective outcome in the form of an Association Agreement, a DCFTA, and accession negotiations.

1.2.2. Post-functionalism

Lisbet Hooghe and Gary Marks (2009) presented a novel approach to studying the European Union – Post-functionalism. Post-functionalism postulates the politicisation of European integration and contests the ‘Permissive Consensus’ paradigm of neo-functionalism. Hooghe and Marks (2009) characterise the period since 1991 as a “constraining dissensus”. It is claimed that the “permissive consensus” in public opinion that once supported the EU integration project has gradually been replaced by a “constraining dissensus” that limits the decisions of pro-EU elites aiming to deepen EU integration. The mechanism responsible for the shift is "politicisation" or, more precisely, the mobilisation of popular opinion about EU policies and institutions (Hooghe & Marks, 2009).

Post-functionalism is a research framework that aims to comprehend new developments in European Union policy through the lens of the multi-level governance approach to European integration. Multi-level governance views regional integration as a component of a broader phenomenon: the distribution of power across different levels of governance. The research program is called Post-functionalism because the term reflects an agnostic bias about whether artificial jurisdictions are adequate (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). The study of mass politics is rooted in political psychology and differs from the rationalist-economic logic that underlies neo-functionalism and the intergovernmental approach. Public opinion scholars consider economic preferences only one of the possible motivations for human behaviour, often less powerful than religion, ethnicity, or communal identity. According to

Post-functionalism, political conflict is critical, affecting communal identity (Hooghe & Marks, 2019). Post-functionalists have mainly studied the impact of domestic politics on integration, highlighting popular pressure and electoral incentives for governments to (dis) integrate. Post-functionalists stress the importance of non-economic interests in holding back integration. Governments tend to oppose legislation consolidating powers when the public is more Eurosceptic or when EU concerns become more visible and politicised (Raskin & Sadeh, 2020).

Post-functionalism assesses the causes and consequences of politicisation in three stages. First, there is a gap between the current institutional framework and the functional requirements of multilevel governance that emerge from interdependence (Hooghe & Marks, 2019). Moreover, the key variable of domestic politicisation is the decision-making arena, which may be confined to government leaders, the civil service, and European institutions, or may occur at the mass politics level, where the media, political parties, social movements, and government coalitions influence it. Political parties shape arena choices - whether the issue enters the realm of mass politics or stays within the domain of an interest group - but their choices are constrained by the rules governing the arena and formal regulations in the state regarding arena selection (such as rules that prescribe or prohibit referendums). The choice of arena determines whether the structure of the conflict surrounding the issue leans toward identity or distribution (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). Hence, the politicisation of European integration has changed the content and decision-making process. On key issues, governments and party leaders try to anticipate the impact of their decisions on the local community (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). Post-functionalism places significant emphasis on the arena in which an issue is discussed, as it influences the nature of the conflict. Mass politics, such as elections, referendums, and party primaries, provide an opportunity to mobilise national identity as a barrier to integration. This depends on the stakes of the issue and, more crucially, on the ability of opposing actors to politicise the matter (Hooghe & Marks, 2019, p. 1117). According to Post-functionalism, parties formulate European issues and cue the masses and the interest groups to restrain or encourage further pooling of authority at the EU level, based on

either materialistic or identity logic. Hence, on key issues, governments and party leaders try to anticipate the impact of their decisions on the local community. Public opinion on European integration has been an area of strategic interaction between party elites in their struggle for political power (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, pp. 8–9).

The third stage analyses how European integration shapes the structure of political conflict. Post-functionalism argues that identity is critical for regional integration at both public and party levels. Therefore, understanding European integration is necessary to know how and when identity is mobilised. To explain how identity influences public opinion about the EU, the following generalisations are applied: identity is more important to the public than to elites or interest groups. It doesn't convey meaning on most political issues by itself but has to be politically constructed. The stronger an individual's identification with the ingroup, the less likely they are to support the maintenance of the jurisdiction of an outgroup. Post-functionalism emphasises the disruptive potential of a clash between functional pressures and exclusive identity. Post-functionalists argue that a person can have a strong national attachment and, at the same time, may have positive attitudes towards European integration. What matters is how they perceive their national identity (exclusive or inclusive of other territorial identities). Those with an exclusive national identity tend to be more Eurosceptic when it is made clear that loyalty to their country and its institutions is incompatible with European integration. Hence, Hooghe and Marks (2009) argue that there was a slowdown in European integration not because people's views on different issues have changed, but because the legitimacy of decision-making has shifted from elites to mass politics. But this did not lead to homogenisation. On the contrary, European politics has become multilevel. The European Union is no longer separate from domestic politics; domestic politics are no longer isolated from Europe (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p.13). Thus, Post-functionalism provides an insight into the growth of national identity, the clash of nationalism with international governance, and the implications for EU policy.

Politicisation is most evident in countries with populist TAN parties. According to Hooghe and Marks (2009), the discussion about Europe is being created by opposition to European integration, that is, populist TAN parties, nationalists in conservative parties and radical left-wing parties. When the challenge comes from populists and national conservatives, the debate centres on identity. When the challenge comes from the radical left, the debate focuses on distribution. Thus, a strong connection exists between GAL (green/alternative/libertarian) / TAN (traditionalism/authority/nationalism) and the party's positioning concerning European integration. This link is particularly strong for parties on the TAN side of the spectrum. TAN parties oppose European integration because they believe it undermines national sovereignty, erodes self-government and introduces foreign ideas. The views on European integration are weaker on the GAL side. For left-wing GAL parties, the European Union remains a challenging concept because it combines GAL politics with market Liberalism (Hooghe & Marks, 2009).

As European integration expanded, it was prone to politicisation. Getting this or that issue into mass politics depends not on its internal importance but on whether a political party will raise it. The framework assumes that party leaders seek to politicise an issue when they see it as an electoral advantage and identifies three (dis)incentives: (1) The higher the potential electoral popularity of a party on any issue, the more it tends to compete with other parties. (2) Reputation considerations and party activists' ideological commitment limit party leaders' ability to pursue votes through strategic positioning. (3) The leaders do not want to make a fuss about an issue is at risk of splitting their party (Hooghe & Marks, 2009).

Despite the general reluctance of elites to politicise European integration, there have been notable exceptions when societies have faced important decisions about joining, expanding or deepening a regime. The existence of constitutional issues that challenge the usual axis of party competition is both a constant source of frustration and a constant temptation for party leaders. The key issue is the referendum. Referendums are elite-driven events that can produce outcomes contrary to elite preferences. While they are used for

immediate impact, their institutional effects tend to be long-lasting (Hooghe & Marks, 2009).

For post-functionalists, politicisation is an endogenous result of party strategy and public opinion. Treaties and referendums are seen as tools for achieving political goals rather than as integral parts of the political structure, which raises the question of how political leaders will respond. According to Post-functionalism, politicisation will stimulate decision-making reform. Of course, the consequences of politicisation would change if the basic preferences of citizens changed. Identities evolve gradually, but they are not static, and their influence on attitudes towards European integration depends on the cues provided by political parties (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). This post-functionalist assumption is consistent with this dissertation since one of the research goals is to identify the link between the discourse of political leaders and parties and the formation of public opinion.

Post-functionalism perceives European integration as a conflict process that arises from incompatible belief systems. As European integration exacerbates identity issues linked to the reconfiguration of the state, it disrupts established party systems, gives rise to new radical left and radical nationalist parties, and hinders the resolution of supranational matters. The systemic effect is the polarisation of society into a cultural divide, which may take the form of a lasting socio-political split. Thus, the range of possible outcomes of the EU integration process in Post-functionalism encompasses not only the status quo or its thorough reform but also the disintegration (Hooghe & Marks, 2019, p. 1117).

Limitations of Post-functionalism

Philippe Schmitter (2009) argues that “identifying a mechanism - the mobilisation of public opinion by opportunistic national politicians - is not the same as specifying its impact, especially whether that impact will be persistent and pervasive enough to determine the future course of the integration process” (Schmitter, 2009, p. 212). Although the Post-functionalism framework provides a credible explanation for the rise of Euroscepticism, at the same time, Post-functionalism cannot explain why the

euro crisis has led to a deepening of integration despite the “constraining dissensus” and the rise of Eurosceptic parties (Börzel & Risse, 2018) (Schimmelfennig, 2014b).

1.2.3. Neo-functionalism

Neofunctionalism was the first theoretical framework to focus solely on European integration (Niemann et al., 2018). The theory was first formulated in the late 1950s by Ernst Haas in response to establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). It is fundamentally different from the theory of Intergovernmentalism because its basic assumption is "transformational", meaning that regional integration over time alters the nature of its participants, activities, institutions and even goals. Moreover, neo-functionalism is pluralistic because it stipulates a wide array of private actors (interest associations, social movements, political parties, firms) that can be essential at national and supranational levels (Niemann et al., 2018). Neofunctionalism attaches great importance to the role of non-state actors - especially the "secretariat" of the regional organisation and those associations and social movements formed at the regional level. Thus, according to neofunctionalism, states are not the most important actors. They set out the terms of the original agreement, but they do not solely determine the direction and extent of subsequent changes (Schmitter, 2002).

Niemann et al. (2018) argue that the neo-functionalism approach can be characterised as elitist. Integration in Europe was based on a process characterised by manipulating elite social forces by small groups of pragmatic politicians in the setting of a vague but condescending public opinion, in other words, "permissive consensus". The early writings of the neo-functionalists paid little attention to the role of public opinion or politicisation. It was considered that public opinion is mainly disinterested or passively compliant and would follow the opinion of political actors. However, from the early to mid-1960s, politicisation was taken more seriously. It was seen as an intermediate variable between economic and political integration (Niemann et al., 2018).

One of the neo-functionalism assumptions is that the regional integration process inevitably creates conflict among member states, especially given the impossibility of accurately foreseeing all the potential outcomes of collective decisions. The most important sources of conflict among member states are endogenous and generated by the integration process. The result of the conflict will be an expansion of the role of those regional institutions that are best placed to exercise supranational power with relative independence from member states. The emergence of more significant conflict concerning regional organisations, their policies, and their increased autonomy will unavoidably lead to politicisation and the mobilisation of more and more public attention to the integration process and the expression of a greater diversity of opinions about it (Schmitter & Lefkofridi, 2016). Crises can delay or even slow down integration, but the supposition is that the proliferation of politics and supranational activity will trigger an upward trend over time. Of course, previous integration creates unforeseen crises that make the status quo unacceptable, but sunk costs make it challenging to change course (Hooghe & Marks, 2019). Therefore, generally, neo-functionalists expected that politicisation would lead to greater support for Europe rather than opposition as the benefits of integration spread from specialised interests to society as a whole (Hooghe & Marks, 2007, p. 119).

Another supposition of neo-functionalism is that the net benefits of increasing regional interdependence will be positive for both the economy and the population. These benefits will be recognised and appreciated by those to whom they are directed. Thus, the general public will seek to positively support existing regional institutions and expand their competence in the future. This support can be passive or active consent, depending on the threats' visibility and the benefits' magnitude. Notably, the early neo-functionalism expected that citizens would steadily shift their loyalties from the national to the European level as they became more aware of the functional, utility-maximising needs of policies. It was assumed that integration would foster increased support among the populations of the member states. However, in later accounts of neo-functionalism, the question of whether loyalties and identities of actors will indeed move to the European level remained open, and it was recognised that this may depend on the EU's

ability to carry out socially valuable tasks efficiently. In addition, neo-functionalists assume that the member states of the transnational regional organisation must have regimes that are both democratic and Liberal and must be committed to respecting the rule of law, human rights, and tolerance of their citizens in political activities. Moreover, the entire regional integration process should be perceived by its participants as “fair”; otherwise, it would lead to increased politicisation (Schmitter & Lefkofridi, 2016, p.6,7).

Neofunctionalism also comes up with assumptions about the dynamics of integration. First, regional institutions can acquire a degree of policy-making autonomy and take on their own life. Secondly, Policy decision-making by regional institutions tends to be incremental. Because of the novelty of the problem, solutions are often arrived at through successive compromises and seemingly small adjustments, which can lead to unintended consequences. Hence, decisions are usually made with incomplete knowledge and often under the pressure of crises and looming deadlines. Thirdly, neo-functionalism rejects the zero-sum idea of realist thought. Games played between actors are usually understood as positive-sum games in which all participants can benefit and where they tend to develop a “supranational” decision-making style in which participants refrain from vetoing proposals unconditionally and instead seek to reach an agreement through compromise (Niemann et al., 2018).

The concept of spillover

Neofunctionalism does not claim to be a universal theory of regional integration. It recognises that the peaceful and coordinated integration of formerly sovereign states has been unprecedented, leading to miscalculations and "unintended consequences" that have triggered periodic crises. The theory emphasises the concept of “spillover”, whereby integration in one policy area leads to further integration in others and from lower to higher levels of supranational authority. Spillovers drive further integration, and three types are identified: functional, political and cultural. Functional spillovers occur when interdependent issues in certain sectors can only be addressed through deeper integration (Niemann et al., 2018). Political

spillover refers to the process by which national elites recognise that important issues cannot be effectively addressed at the domestic level. Therefore, elites shift their expectations and political activities to a new European centre. Cultivated spillover pressure concerns the role of supranational institutions that are anxious to increase their powers and become agents of integration because they are likely to benefit from this process (Niemann & Ioannou, 2015).

According to the framework, regional integration is inherently sporadic and conflictual. Still, in conditions of democracy and pluralistic representation, national governments will increasingly become involved in regional pressure and ultimately resolve their conflicts by transferring more powers to the regional organisations they have created. As a result, their citizens will begin to transfer more and more of their expectations to the region, and their satisfaction will increase the likelihood that socio-economic integration will "spillover" into political integration (Schmitter, 2002).

Criticism of neofunctionalism

Moravcsik (1998) argued that neofunctionalism was too ambitious, vague, and incoherent to generate precise predictions. Hooghe and Marks (2009) contested the "permissive consensus" assumption. Its creator even declared it obsolete (see Haas, 1975) (Schmitter, 2002). Therefore, it was evident that neofunctionalism required fundamental revision.

Revised neofunctionalism differs from early neofunctionalism in leaving open the question of whether actors' loyalties and identities will ultimately shift to the European level. It places more emphasis on transnational exchanges and supranational institutions. In addition, Arne Niemann's revised framework extends the scope of functional spillovers beyond economic linkages and refines the concept of political spillovers (Niemann 2006).

To conclude, Neo-functionalism is generally more helpful in analysing regional integration from the EU than the state perspective because it downplays national governments' roles and interests. Neo-functionalism assumes that integration is a gradual and spillover-driven process of

integration, which isn't the case for Ukraine. Moreover, this theory pays little attention to the role of society in the regional integration processes. As the thesis examines European integration from the perspective of the state, with a strong emphasis on the societal level, this theory is not particularly applicable.

1.2.4. Institutionalism

Institutionalism is a theory used to study the European Union and international relations in general . It focuses on how institutions, such as rules, norms, structures and procedures, shape participants' behaviour in the political system. In the context of EU studies, institutionalism explains the role of European institutions and their influence on the policy-making process, integration and behaviour of member states and other actors. There are three primary approaches to institutionalism: rational choice, sociological institutionalism, and historical analysis.

Rational choice institutionalism assumes that actors have fixed preferences and behave strategically to maximise these preferences, often through extensive calculation. It portrays politics as a series of collective action dilemmas in which individuals acting in their self-interest can lead to sub-optimal outcomes. Institutions are seen as mechanisms created to resolve these dilemmas by encouraging cooperation and ensuring complementary behaviour among actors. Rational choice institutionalists explain the emergence of institutions by their ability to provide benefits, primarily through the gains from cooperation. Institutions emerge through voluntary agreements and survive if they offer greater benefits than alternative forms. A key contribution of rational choice institutionalism is its emphasis on strategic interaction, where actors' decisions are influenced by their expectations of the behaviour of others. Institutions play a crucial role in structuring these interactions, reducing uncertainty and facilitating cooperation, leading to potentially better collective outcomes (Hall & Taylor, 1996). Since the rational choice approach to the EU is based on a very limited set of suppositions about the actors and their preferences, this approach is not

helpful for the thesis, which aims to understand how the preferences of society and political elites influence the choice of regional integration.

Sociological institutionalism emerged within organisational theory in the late 1970s, challenging the traditional distinction between formal, rational organisational structures and the diverse cultural practices they embody. It argued that bureaucratic forms considered adequate for contemporary tasks are strongly influenced by cultural norms rather than purely rational or efficiency motives (Hall & Taylor, 1996). Sociological institutionalism defines institutions more broadly, including informal norms, conventions, and formal rules. They argue that such institutions constitute actors and shape how actors view the world (Pollack, 2008). This approach redefines “culture” as “institutions”. It moves away from considering culture solely as affective attitudes or values, instead understanding it as a network of procedures, symbols, and scripts that provide behaviour patterns. Sociological institutionalists argue that what individuals perceive as 'rational action' is shaped by social contexts, and they see the goals that actors pursue in much broader terms than others. While rational choice theorists often assume that individuals or organisations seek to maximise material well-being, sociologists see them as seeking to define and express their identity in a socially acceptable way. Moreover, sociological institutionalists explain that institutional practices originate and change not because they improve efficiency but because they enhance the social legitimacy of organisations or their members. Organisations adopt practices valued within a broader cultural context, even if these practices may not align with the organisation’s formal goals. This is described as a “logic of social appropriateness” (Hall & Taylor, 1996). While sociological institutionalism is well suited to understanding how norms, values and identity shape the integration process, it primarily concerns how institutions evolve and influence behaviour. It focuses more on institutional dynamics and the internalisation of norms in political structures than on public opinion. Since the thesis aims to understand how public sentiment influenced Ukraine's choice of European integration, this approach is not appropriate.

Historical institutionalists focus on the effects of institutions over time. The theory emphasises path dependence, which means that once a specific institutional path is taken, it can be difficult to reverse or change, even if the political context changes. Historical institutionalists argue that institutional choices taken in the past can persist over time, thereby shaping and constraining actors later in time. It is argued that institutions resist change because of the uncertainty inherent in their design, as well as the significant transaction costs and high institutional thresholds created by national constitutions and international treaties (Pierson, 2000). This helps to explain the persistence of particular EU policies and structures. Historical institutionalism argues that institutions are not simply passive environments for political action but actively shape policy outcomes. According to March and Olsen (1989), institutions such as formal organisations, bureaucracies and legal systems provide order and influence political change. They emphasise that political institutions play an independent role, not only being affected by society but also influencing it. Historical institutionalism goes beyond the focus on formal structures to include the beliefs, paradigms, cultures and knowledge embedded in these institutions that further influence political processes.

The historical institutionalism is not particularly useful for understanding Ukraine's choice of European integration. Historical institutionalism and its concept of 'path dependence' help explain how and under what conditions historical events shape political decisions and outcomes. This approach may be valuable in explaining Ukraine's European integration process after 2014 and the start of the war with Russia, when the choice of European integration was irreversible. However, this approach cannot adequately explain why Ukraine chose European integration in the first place rather than integration with Russia. Following the logic of path dependency, it would seem more rational - and less costly - for Ukraine to seek integration with the Eurasian Union rather than the European Union, given its historical ties to Russia and the Soviet legacy. Since the central puzzle of the thesis is why Ukraine chose to integrate with the European Union rather than the Eurasian Union, understanding Ukraine's decision to move towards European integration

requires a deeper examination of the broader political and social factors that influenced this decision.

In sum, the institutionalism theory is useful to apply to the studies of the EU, not only at the EU level but also at the level of member states. However, the new institutionalism is somewhat limited in understanding European integration, its further enlargement and its causes. Pollack (2008) claims that neither theory constitutes an adequate theory of European integration, the ultimate causes of which typically remain exogenous to the theory. Instead, each of them opens its unique perspective on the functioning of institutions. Furthermore, since institutions are central to new institutionalism, the theory pays little attention to public opinion. This is one of the reasons why institutionalism is not applicable to this thesis since the main goal of the thesis is to understand the causes and main drivers of Ukraine's EU integration and how the preferences of society and political elites impact the choice for EU integration.

1.3. Literature Review on the European Integration of Ukraine: the Gap

Public opinion and the formation of society's preferences for European integration have been widely addressed in the literature. Buhbe (2017) conducted an empirical survey on how Ukrainians perceive European values. Konieczna (2005) studied the causes of public discontent that led to the Orange Revolution. Zubko and Rovnyi (2015) studied perceptions of the EU in Ukraine following the Revolution of Dignity. Zolkina (2014) examined how public opinion about the EU has changed in different regions of Ukraine from 2011 until 2014 – before and after the Euromaidan. The Razumkov Centre has conducted empirical surveys to study the identity of Ukrainian citizens since 2005. All these empirical studies provide a reasonable basis for further analysis and research of the driving forces supporting EU integration in Ukraine. However, no comprehensive study has examined the main drivers of public support for Ukraine's European integration through the lens of European integration theories. This dissertation aims to fill this gap by

analysing the political, economic, cultural, and historical factors influencing Ukrainians' support for the EU, using the theoretical frameworks of Liberal Intergovernmentalism.

The formation of party preferences for European integration has also been a subject of much research (Kuzio, 1997, 2016; Utkin, 2019). Karácsonyi et al. (2014) analysed how Ukrainian political elites exploit deep-rooted regional political divisions, including different preferences for integration with the EU or Russia, which are influenced by historical, socioeconomic and cultural factors. Many scholars have studied the motivations of the political elite during the Orange Revolution (Larrabee, 2010; Shevchuk & Trach, 2009; Sushko & Lisnychuk, 2005; Wilson, 2014; Woehrel, 2005; Wolczuk, 2003, 2004). There is also a lot of literature on the motivations of the Ukrainian political elite before and after the Euromaidan (Smith & Harari, 2014; Wilson, 2014). Much of the literature analyses the political elite's attitude towards signing the Association Agreement with the EU and forming state policy on European integration (Wolczuk, 2014, 2014). For instance, Duleba (2019) interviewed EU and Ukrainian officials involved in implementing the Association Agreement and analysed their perceptions of the opportunities and problems in EU–Ukraine relations.

The institutionalisation of Ukraine-EU relations has also been extensively studied, particularly as regards the Association Agreement. Ukrainian and international scholars have studied the economic dimensions of Ukraine's integration into the European Union. Following the implementation of the DCFTA, most studies have focused on analysing its impact, advantages and disadvantages for Ukraine (Adarov & Havlik, 2017; Emerson & Movchan, 2018; Kharlamova, 2016; Latkovskiy & Marushchak, 2019; Sadowski, 2012; Vošta et al., 2016). Kubatko and Pimonenko (2016) highlighted the challenges and opportunities for Ukrainian entrepreneurs under the DCFTA, while Yatsenko et al. (2017) identified risks in agriculture. Gressel (2016) examined EU support for Ukraine's economic and political transformation since the signing of the Association Agreement, covering macro-financial assistance, security and humanitarian assistance, and support for energy security, environmental protection, and anti-corruption efforts. More recent

studies focus on Ukraine's economic readiness for EU accession (Grieveson et al., 2023) and assess whether the Association Agreement still serves its intended purpose (Van der Loo & Van Elsuwege, 2022). Although many scholars have analysed the outcome of EU–Ukraine relations and its institutionalisation, particularly the role of AA and DCFTA, there is little research on a comprehensive analysis of what complex processes preceded the establishment of these relations and the signing of the Association Agreement (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2014). At the same time, several scholars have analysed the Russia-Ukraine-EU triangle (D’Anieri, 2019; Samokhvalov, 2015), but no one has approached the issue through the prism of Liberal Intergovernmentalism. In particular, no comprehensive study examines how these three countries' preferences were formed, their bargaining power and the outcome of institutional development between the states involved.

While the Liberal intergovernmental approach is typically used to analyse EU integration processes and the bargaining between member states to implement new policies, it can also be applied to analysing EU agreements with third countries. Both association agreements (under Articles 300 and 310 of the EC Treaty) and accession to the EU (under Article 49 of the EU Treaty) require unanimity among member states, which places them within the framework of intergovernmental negotiations (Montanari, 2007a). The framework of Liberal Intergovernmentalism has been used to analyse the EU's association agreements with third countries, the EU-ACP Cotonou Agreement (Forwood, 2001), and the Euro-Mediterranean association agreements (Montanari, 2007b). EU enlargement and integration with candidate countries has been analysed through the lens of Liberal Intergovernmentalism, particularly in the case of Eastern Enlargement (Moravcsik & Vachudova, 2003; Schimmelfennig, 2001). Tsarouhas (2021) apply this framework to EU-Turkey relations, examining key neoLiberal principles, LI's three-stage integration approach, and various forms of cooperation such as the customs union, Turkey's EU membership bid, and the EU-Turkey migration agreement. Kalemaj (2015) analyses the EU's policy towards the western Balkans, using Liberal Intergovernmentalism and neo-

functionalism to explore why the enlargement process has stalled and lacks a clear future.

There is limited research applying the Liberal Intergovernmentalism framework to the case of Ukraine. Montanari (2007a) used this framework to explore Ukraine's potential integration with the EU, analysing three scenarios: a free trade area, a fully developed European Neighbourhood Policy and EU accession. While this article provides a valuable starting point for applying LI theory to Ukraine, it was written after the Orange Revolution and does not take into account significant developments in EU-Ukraine relations, such as the Euromaidan, the signing of the Association Agreement and Ukraine's subsequent acquisition of EU candidate status in the context of Russian aggression, which this dissertation is going to address.

Moravcsik and Emmons (2021) demonstrate the application of the Liberal intergovernmental mechanism to EU external action, using the EU's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014 as a case study. Fink and Kader (2023) applied Liberal Intergovernmentalism to examine the EU's decision to activate Directive 2001/55/EC, a directive never used before, to grant temporary protection to Ukrainian refugees during the 2022 crisis. Both articles examine how Liberal Intergovernmentalism explains the EU's response and policy after Russia's invasions - one focuses on the aftermath of 2014, the other on 2022. This dissertation applies the LI framework to analyse Ukraine's interests at stake and its policy towards the EU in response to Russia's aggression in both 2014 and 2022.

Börzel (2023) applies Liberal Intergovernmentalism and Post-functionalism to examine the EU's response to Russia's war on Ukraine, concluding that identity politics is a key factor in the integration process. The article applies Post-functionalism to understand the EU's perspective; this thesis aims to understand Ukraine's perspective instead. Bosse (2022) examines how the EU consensus on sanctions and refugee protection for Ukraine, guided by shared moral and value norms, shaped EU foreign policy in response to Russia's invasion. Several studies have examined identity

politics in Ukraine and its impact on foreign policy (Delwaide, 2011; Kuzio, 1998, 2002; Zhurzhenko, 2014).

1.4. Research Design

The literature reviewed reveals a gap in the application of LI to the analysis of the European Union's foreign relations (Moravcsik & Emmons, 2021) and the integration of candidate countries into the EU (Moravcsik & Vachudova, 2003; Schimmelfennig, 2001), making applying this theory particularly relevant. Furthermore, theoretical studies applying Liberal Intergovernmentalism to the case of Ukraine are limited, with most focusing primarily on analysing the EU's integration policy towards Ukraine (Börzel, 2023; Fink & Kader, 2023; Moravcsik & Emmons, 2021). This study aims to fill this gap by using LI to examine Ukraine's key motivations for pursuing EU integration and how these preferences are translated into practice.

Based on the literature review of the existing theories of European integration, Liberal Intergovernmentalism (see especially Moravcsik, 1993, 1998) is the most useful framework for analysing Ukraine's European integration. LI focuses on the process of European integration from the state's perspective. This theory examines how national preferences for integration are formed, how states negotiate with each other, and how institutions are created due to this process. In contrast, neo-functionalism focuses more on the perspective of the European Union and pays little attention to the role of society, making it less applicable to the case of Ukraine. On the other hand, institutionalism places more emphasis on the institutions themselves than on the state's pursuit of European integration, which is the focus of this thesis. Post-functionalism, however, focuses on the relationship between political elites and society, particularly from the perspective of identity politics. While Liberal Intergovernmentalism provides a more detailed and robust framework for analysing the integration process from the state's perspective, Post-functionalism can serve as a helpful addition, particularly in explaining the role of identity politics in Ukraine's European integration.

Through process tracing, the research first identifies the relevant actors involved, then studies the formation of their preferences and how they shape their actions, and then analyses how these actions produce the collective outcome (Schimmelfennig, 2014a). Key tenets of LI will be applied to structure the analysis, focusing on three stages: national preference formation, interstate bargaining, and institutional choice to understand these events better. To investigate the causal factors in the formation of national preferences, the process of preference formation by key domestic actors, including society and political elites, is examined.

Liberal Intergovernmentalism is most effective in the context of significant events and treaty changes, especially in decisive integration situations that require unanimous decisions (Benczes, 2018). Such decisive moments in the context of Ukrainian European integration were the Orange Revolution of 2004, the Euromaidan Revolution of 2013, and the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. These historical moments have had a profound impact on Ukraine's geopolitical orientation and the evolving identity of its society. In 2004, the issue of European integration was first put on the agenda and brought to the masses. In 2014, President Yanukovich's refusal to sign the Association Agreement led to the revolution. Euromaidan was when the population and political elites finally settled on the direction of European integration. The war with Russia was the third turning point, consolidating Ukraine's European choice. Therefore, the dissertation will analyse Ukraine's integration into the EU by focusing on these three events, as it was here that the main developments in this process were recorded, both from the Ukrainian and the EU sides.

National Preference Formation

The first step in the LI framework for states is to formulate "national preferences," meaning they identify the main goals, policies, and tactics they pursue (Moravcsik, 1993, 1998). According to LI, national preferences are formed considering the preferences of national interest groups, including society (Moravcsik, 2020). This is the case in Ukraine, where society and

political elites played an essential role in shaping foreign policy and national preferences.

Since the primary goal of the thesis is to understand how the preferences of key domestic actors shape Ukraine's European integration process, it is crucial to define and operationalise the selection criteria of these key domestic actors. This thesis focuses solely on the role of society and political elites in shaping Ukraine's decision to pursue European integration. The author is aware of other domestic actors such as business and industry associations, oligarchs, civil society organisations, trade unions, media outlets, religious institutions, think tanks, intellectuals, opinion leaders, etc. However, excluding these internal actors is a way of refining the analysis to focus on the most influential and directly observable influences. Society and political elites are the most relevant in the Ukrainian context. Public engagement combined with the actions of political elites was crucial in shaping the EU integration agenda in the case of Ukraine, where public support for EU integration during the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity was a crucial factor in pushing political parties and leaders to prioritise European integration. Moreover, political leaders and parties tend to be the most influential in managing integration's overall pace and direction. Political elites also have the power to influence public opinion and shape national debates on EU membership, as was the case during the Orange Revolution and Euromaidan. This makes their role central to understanding Ukraine's integration processes.

First, the thesis aims to explore how societal dynamics influenced the formation of national preferences for EU integration. By focusing on society, the dissertation will explore how public opinion and mass movements influence political agendas and decisions. The case of Ukraine is characterised by a high degree of responsiveness of political leaders to social pressure, making social factors fundamental to the integration process. Given that the public played a central role in both the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity, examining how society contributed to the formation of national preferences to pursue European integration is crucial. Moreover, Ukraine's electoral process was relatively fair, as reflected in the consistency

between pre-election polls and election results. By analysing the electoral choices made by Ukrainians, it is possible to trace the direction they supported for the country. This is particularly important in the context of each presidential election before 2014, when debates over issues such as language (especially the role of the Russian language) and whether to pursue a pro-EU or pro-Russian political course were central themes of political discourse, especially in pre-election campaigns. This will be studied in detail in the second chapter of the dissertation. Furthermore, the reasons behind the strong support for the EU among the Ukrainian public will be analysed. Considering the population's strong historical and cultural relations with Russia, the strong support for European integration instead of the Eurasian represents an interesting case. Special attention will be paid to the role of identity politics in forming such society's preferences.

Second, the preference formation of political elites will be analysed by examining the political discourse of the president at the time and their political decisions and policies. Ukraine's political culture, influenced by its Soviet legacy, is characterised by a problematic separation of powers and a tendency for presidents to concentrate authority in their hands. As a result, political parties have often served as short-term electoral instruments rather than mechanisms for competitive leadership transitions. Consequently, the central figures in Ukraine's political landscape are presidents or leaders of competing political parties, as in the case of the Orange Revolution (Yushchenko and Yanukovych). Hence, the dissertation focuses on analysing the preference formation of political elites rather than political parties. While the politics of competing political parties in the pre-election debates and during Revolutions will be examined, the emphasis will be on the Presidents and their political course. Ukrainian political elites were central figures in the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity. Therefore, examining political change in Ukraine, particularly the change of presidential leadership, is essential to understanding the country's national preference formation.

Based on the analysis of society and political elites' preferences, the thesis will conclude how national preferences were formed. Consequently, the leading national preferences of Ukraine will be identified and summarised.

Interstate Bargaining

The second stage of analysis, as outlined by LI, is interstate bargaining, which posits that states engage in negotiations to secure mutual benefit (Moravcsik & Emmons, 2021). Applying the process tracing method, the thesis will examine how state preferences shape their actions and influence the process of interstate bargaining. The negotiation processes and the development of Ukraine's relations with the EU and Russia will be examined at this level. The politics of Ukraine's balancing policy between Russia and the EU will also be explored. At this stage, the thesis will briefly explore the bargaining power of Russia and the EU and their key motivations during the negotiation process.

Institutional Choice

The third stage of analysis is the institutional choice that results from interstate bargaining if states reach an agreement. Drawing on the process tracing method, the thesis analyses how the actions of key actors in intergovernmental negotiations shape the collective outcome and lead to the creation of specific institutional solutions. This stage examines the agreements or institutions, if any, established between Ukraine and the EU and between Ukraine and Russia. The institutional level will be excluded from Ukraine's EU integration analysis following the Orange Revolution (2004). Even though the negotiations on the Association Agreement started in 2007 following the Orange Revolution, no concrete agreement was reached during this period.

Table 1 below summarises how the three stages of Liberal Intergovernmentalism will be applied to the analysis of the Ukrainian case study. The framework will be used for the three main events in the contemporary history of Ukraine – the Orange Revolution, the Euromaidan Revolution and the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022.

Table 1. The Structure of the Analysis: Application of LI to the Case of Ukraine

Key events	National Preferences	Interstate Bargaining	Institutional Choice
The Orange Revolution	How the interaction of societal and political elite preferences influenced the formation of national preferences for European integration during the revolution.	Main focus: - bargaining between Ukraine and Russia after the revolution; Yushchenko's "balanced" foreign policy approach between the EU and Russia.	excluded because the Ukraine -EU relations were in its early stages of development; no concrete agreement was reached during this period.
The Euromaidan Revolution	It examines how the disagreement between political elites and society over the direction of regional integration led to the Euromaidan and, consequently, to the formation of new national preferences.	Yanukovich's government negotiations with the EU and Russia before the Vilnius summit, where he was expected to sign an AA, are examined.	The main focus is on the analysis of the institutionalisation of EU-Ukraine relations after the Euromaidan with regard to the AA (signed in 2014) and the DCFTA (2016). After the Russian annexation of Crimea and the aggression in the east of Ukraine, the institutionalisation between Ukraine and Russia was not relevant and is therefore omitted.
The Russian invasion of 2022	It examines the consolidation between society and political elites regarding national preferences for further European integration.	The process of negotiations between Ukraine and the EU on the granting of candidate status to Ukraine and the consequent negotiations on possible membership is assessed.	Progress in fulfilling the Association Agreement and the Commission's recommendations for granting candidate status to Ukraine will be examined. Due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, institutionalisation between Russia and Ukraine was not relevant and is therefore omitted.

Source: own construction

2. UKRAINE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST: THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF UKRAINE'S RELATIONS WITH THE EU AND RUSSIA

This chapter provides a historical overview of Ukraine's relations with the EU and Russia. It explores Ukraine's interactions with the European Union and Russia from 1991 to the present, highlighting how the country's Soviet legacy has shaped the development of these relationships. Special attention is paid to Ukraine's relations with Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, particularly Russia's role in the Orange and Euromaidan revolutions and the influence of the Russian factor on Ukraine's European choice. The chapter is structured around the chronology of the presidents and their impact on the Ukrainian political landscape. Ukraine's first two presidents, Kravchuk and Kuchma, are briefly discussed, as relations with the EU were not a significant focus during their tenures. However, the focus will be on the history of Ukraine since 2004, starting with the vital milestone of Ukraine's European reorientation, the Orange Revolution. It will also analyse the electoral process, which is crucial for understanding the geopolitical division of society between eastern and western Ukraine, primarily until 2014. This analysis will also show how this division developed after the Euromaidan Revolution and the Russian-Ukrainian War. By examining the official election results, it will be investigated how political leaders have exploited the East-West divide and the language issue in society to maintain power and how these dynamics have changed over time. In addition, this section analyses the evolution of government policy towards the EU and Russia, examining how each change in presidential leadership has affected Ukraine's foreign policy and its approach to European integration. Thus, this section provides a historical context to explain the preconditions for Ukraine's European choice and to lay the groundwork for the analytical analysis of the case in the following sections.

2.1. Ukraine in the aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR from 1991 until 2004 and its relationship with Russia and the EU

Ukraine became independent as a result of the failed coup of August 1991, which resulted in the disintegration of the Soviet Union. On August 24, 1991, the Supreme Soviet in Kyiv proclaimed Ukraine an independent state (Solchanyk, 1992, p.31). On December 1, 1991, Ukraine held a referendum to determine whether its citizens supported declaring independence. On the same day, presidential elections took place, culminating in Leonid Kravchuk's impressive victory with 62 per cent vote. The referendum's result was overwhelmingly in favour of independence, with over 90 per cent of voters supporting it. This exceeded even the most optimistic predictions. The decision to seek independence was influenced by various factors, including a growing realisation among Ukrainians of the negative impact of the Soviet era on their country. This included the exposure of Stalin's crimes, the devastating Holodomor famine of 1932-33, and the Chornobyl nuclear disaster. Additionally, many believed that independence would improve the Ukrainian population's living standards, reflecting the traditional belief in Ukraine's rich lands and abundant resources (Subtelny, 2009, p. 664). Hence, there was a strong belief among the population that Ukraine would quickly emerge as a prominent nation in Europe, if not globally, following its independence. However, it soon became apparent that significant efforts and intricate state-building processes lay ahead to achieve this goal.

The all-Ukrainian referendum marked a crucial turning point in the dissolution of the USSR. Gorbachev himself declared that "the Soviet Union without Ukraine is inconceivable." (Subtelny, 2009). The Belavezha Accords were signed on December 8, 1991, by Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine, officially disbanding the Soviet Union (Budjeryn, 2022).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine found itself entangled between Russia and Europe, and its geopolitical position made its foreign policy trajectory unique and extremely important for analysis. The enormous interdependence between Russia and Ukraine was particularly significant in the early years of independence. These years largely determined the nature of relations between the countries, and the analysis of this period is essential for

understanding the reasons for the deterioration of relations between the countries and the reasons for Ukraine's reorientation towards the EU. This subchapter delves into the details of economic, social and political cooperation between Ukraine and Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, focusing on the first decade of Ukraine's independence from 1991 until the early 2000s. The events following the Orange Revolution are discussed in detail in the following chapters.

2.1.1. Economic Cooperation

Upon gaining independence, Ukraine not only broke free from the Soviet Union but also inherited a multitude of unresolved issues left behind by the former regime. Ukraine had no choice but to collaborate with the other former Soviet republics, especially with Russia. This was primarily due to the interdependence between the economies of these countries, which necessitated discussions on economic cooperation, trade, and supply. Additionally, there was a need for cooperation on political and military matters (Shevtsova, 1992). Relations between Ukraine and Russia can be characterised as tense from the beginning. Although the Russian government had no choice but to recognise Ukraine's independence, relations between Ukraine and Russia were strained (Subtelny, 2009). Since its independence, Ukraine has perceived Russia as a possible threat to its territorial integrity. Despite Russia's expectations, Ukraine's decision to leave the Soviet Union was driven by a desire to get closer to Europe and distance itself from Russia (Golani, 2011).

Since the former republics were deeply reliant on each other economically, this led to the necessity of addressing matters like overall economic cooperation in trade and supply (Gitelman, 1994). Some republics possessed abundant natural resources and energy reserves, while others struggled with scarcity. Some excelled in producing specific industrial goods that were essential for the rest. For instance, Ukraine played a crucial role as a food exporter (Shevtsova, 1992). These intricate relationships compelled the republics to cooperate.

Already in the summer of 1992, the initial optimism about Ukraine's political and economic situation began to fade. The financial condition of the country worsened significantly. When Russia increased the prices of consumer goods in January 1992, Ukraine was forced to do the same. The breakdown of economic ties within the former Soviet Union further deepened the crisis in industrial production (Hrytsak, 2000, p. 235). In 1992-1993, the break-up of the unified national economic system and the financial sector's collapse resulted in a massive inflationary shock, a significant drop in GDP, and a decline in the population's standard of living (Dabrowski, 2022).

Moreover, Ukraine's economy relied heavily on Russian oil and gas supplies, resulting in almost complete economic dependence on Russia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine became the largest importer of Russian gas, importing some 47-57 billion cubic metres (bcm) per year while producing only 19-21 bcm. Ukraine also appeared to be a significant transit route for gas exports from Russia to Europe, with about 80 per cent of the total transit volume (Pirani et al., 2009). As a result, in the 1990s, gas relations between Russia and Ukraine were characterised by Ukraine's inability to pay for the gas it imported from Russia, leading to significant debts (up to 50 bcm per year). This led to temporary reductions in Russian gas supplies to Ukraine. These reductions, in turn, led to unauthorised usage of gas destined for European countries (Stern, 2006). Such energy interdependence between the two countries inevitably led to numerous gas conflicts in the 1990s and early 2000s.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, post-Soviet countries decided to develop their relations in the form of Eurasian regionalism (Furman & Libman, 2019). On December 7-8, 1991, the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus not only dissolved the USSR but also created the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). But it would soon become evident that they were sharply divided as to the exact role of this entity. Russia insisted on CIS to be a supra-national organisation that would coordinate the military, political, and economic policies of the post-Soviet countries (Subtelny, 2009). Ukraine, in turn, recognised that strong economic links with Russia must be maintained but rejected attempts to institutionalise ties within a CIS framework in which

Russia is a dominant player. Ukraine argued that the CIS must be a loose structure of fully independent countries (van Ham, 1994). Ukraine was not willing to allow the organisation to impose any restrictions on the sovereignty of Ukraine. Ukraine viewed CIS as a means to obtain an "institutional divorce" from the former USSR (Golani, 2011) by reducing any possible tensions and developing a common economic organisation uniting post-soviet states (Furman & Libman, 2019).

Eventually, in May 1993, all CIS leaders (except Turkmenistan) signed a declaration of intent to deepen economic integration (van Ham, 1994). However, the CIS has fallen short of its initial goals of consolidating military forces and sustaining economic collaboration (Wuchte, 1996). Ukraine has played a crucial role in shaping the course of events. From the onset of its independence, Ukraine acknowledged the importance of maintaining ties with Russia but adopted a cautious approach. The focus was on fostering economic relations rather than political or military alliances. Ukraine consistently avoided joining any organisations led by Russia that could potentially compromise its sovereignty.

2.1.2. Political Cooperation

Ukraine's reluctance to modernise the Commonwealth into a thriving economic and political organisation, its strong desire to become a member of the European Union and NATO, and its commitment to strengthening political and security ties with Central and western European nations have further strained its relationship with Russia (van Ham, 1994). Ukraine did not favour preserving a single military-strategic space with a single army. It intended to establish independent armed forces, which was believed necessary to defend Ukraine's sovereignty. In the fall of 1991, Ukraine moved decisively to develop its Ministry of Defence. The state embarked on efforts to create national armed forces, claiming jurisdiction over all Soviet military units on its territory (Budjeryn, 2022). In May 1992, Ukraine refused to sign the CIS Collective Security treaty and opted out of participating in the political and security integration efforts among post-Soviet states.

Nuclear dispute

Nevertheless, Ukraine needed to cooperate with former republics on various political and military issues. With Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia, Ukraine had to coordinate policy concerning Soviet strategic nuclear forces (Shevtsova, 1992). The nuclear dispute demonstrated the inevitability of complex bilateral relations between Russia and Ukraine since then.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, there was a debate over who would take ownership of the nuclear arsenal, which accounted for almost 30,000 nuclear weapons and were now spread across four newly independent states: Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine. Although Ukraine could not use the nuclear weapons it possessed, Ukraine turned out to be the third largest nuclear power in the world (van Ham, 1994). This posed security concerns not only to Russia but to the whole world.

Russia ultimately inherited the majority of the Soviet nuclear weapons, becoming the recognised successor under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Initially, the NPT recognised five countries as nuclear weapons states, namely the USA, USSR, Great Britain, France, and China, all of which developed nuclear capabilities before January 1, 1967. Following the dissolution of the USSR, Russia's position concerning the NPT was thorough and unquestionable: being the rightful successor of the USSR, it continues to be a signatory to the nuclear weapons agreement (Walker, 1992). However, any other nation seeking to acquire or possess nuclear arms must do so outside the NPT regime. Opting to remain outside the NPT as a nuclear power was considered undesirable, particularly for a newly established state looking to integrate into the international community on favourable terms (Budjeryn, 2022). The West insisted that the Soviet Union's other successor states join the treaty as non-nuclear weapons states. Moreover, Russia applied both economic and political tactics to pressure Ukraine, utilising Ukraine's reliance on Russian gas and the huge Russian ethnic communities in Ukraine (Golani, 2011). As a result, although Ukraine initially hesitated, it had no choice but to relinquish its nuclear ambitions to align with the interests of the dominant nuclear powers.

With intense international and Russian pressure, Ukraine signed the Trilateral Statement in January 1994, where the United States and Russia provided security guarantees of the territorial integrity of Ukraine. The RF reiterated these guarantees in the Budapest Declaration of December 1994 (Golani, 2011). By May 1996, all of Ukraine's remaining Soviet-era nuclear warheads had been safely removed from the country (Persson, 2019).

Ukraine's decision to disarm has been brought back into the spotlight following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and ongoing military aggression towards Ukraine. Russia's disregard for Ukraine's sovereignty contradicts the security assurances provided to Ukraine by nuclear powers when it signed the NPT. Additionally, Russian interference violated its obligations to Ukraine under the Budapest Memorandum. Ukraine sought these security guarantees because it felt vulnerable to Russia's threats and believed the US would pay less attention to its security needs (Budjeryn, 2022) once disarmed. These agreements and events influence public opinion regarding the functioning of international security structures to this day. Public opinion regarding international security institutions and guarantees provided to Ukraine by western partners is negative. Many consider the country's surrender of nuclear weapons a grave mistake, if not a breach of trust and deception of the world community. The lingering impact of this experience continues to breed scepticism and wariness about future international deals, whether with Russia or the West.

Dispute over the status of Crimea

Another challenge that independent Ukraine faced was the status of Crimea, which became a critical and contentious issue that needed immediate resolution. Right after Ukraine gained independence, Russian parliament deputies questioned the inclusion of Crimea in the new Ukrainian state, claiming that the transfer of the peninsula from Russia to Ukraine in 1954 was not in line with the constitution (Subtelny, 2009). In May 1992, Russia reevaluated the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine in 1954 and declared it illegal. Subsequently, in July 1993, the Russian State Duma granted federal status to the city of Sevastopol (Golani, 2011). Indeed, Crimea was transferred to Ukraine by Nikita Khrushchev in 1954 as a gift to commemorate Ukraine and

Russia's 300th anniversary of unity, precisely the anniversary of signing the Treaty of Perejaslav (Wydra, 2003). The act was symbolic primarily because, at the time, Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union, and few could have predicted the collapse of the USSR (Larrabee, 2010, p.42).

Nonetheless, Crimea's incorporation into the Ukrainian SSR was not merely a gift but a strategic decision made post-World War II for the reconstruction and development of the region. Crimea was transferred to Ukraine following the Soviet constitutional law of that time (Merezhko, 2016). The decision was based on the shared economic interests, geographical proximity, and substantial economic and cultural ties between the two regions. Moreover, Crimea heavily depended on essential resources like water and electricity from the neighbouring regions of Kherson and Mykolaiv in the Ukrainian SSR. Furthermore, the industrial districts of Ukraine, particularly cities like Dnipropetrovsk, Kyiv, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, and Donbas, played a crucial role in providing the necessary raw materials, machinery, and equipment for the reconstruction of Crimea's cities, industries, and infrastructure (Skrukwa, 2011). Consequently, the Crimea we see today was reconstructed by the Ukrainian SSR and continues to depend on resources from mainland Ukraine heavily.

In the December 1991 referendum, which centred on Ukraine's declaration of independence, 54 per cent of voters in Crimea supported Ukraine's independence (CSAHAA of Ukraine, 1991). However, since 58 per cent of the population in the peninsula is made up of ethnic Russians, Crimea stands out as the only region in Ukraine where Russians constitute a substantial majority (Larrabee, 2010). Therefore, separatist sentiments existed in Crimea from the beginning of Ukraine's independence and did not come as a surprise to many. Already in 1992, the Russian parliament's actions were strengthened in Crimea itself by Communist hard-liners and Russian nationalists who maintained control (Subtelny, 2009). On May 5, 1992, the Crimean parliament declared independence of Crimea and adopted its first constitution. However, under pressure from Ukraine, the constitution was revised on May 6, 1992, to include a clause stating that Crimea was part of Ukraine (Bebler, 2015). Despite repeated attempts by political elites in

Crimea to declare independence from Ukraine, Russia supported Ukraine's sovereignty over Crimea in the first half of the 1990s during Yeltsin's administration, mainly because of the Chechen wars (Golani, 2011). On June 30, 1992, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine approved the expanded autonomous status of the peninsula (Wydra, 2003, p. 117). In short, the status of Crimea held the utmost importance for Russian security and political interests in the region, creating an ongoing point of contention between Ukraine and Russia.

Dispute over the ownership of the Black Sea

The Crimean issue led to another, that of the Black Sea fleet. The fleet, stationed in Crimea, consisted of around 300 ships and 60,000-70,000 personnel, making Ukraine a country of strategic importance to Russia (Subtelny, 2009). Following the dissolution of the USSR, Russia and Ukraine disputed the ownership of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet, which had a major symbolic and military significance for Russia's regional position.

As in the case of nuclear weapon negotiations, Russia exercised economic pressure on Ukraine to gain control over the Black Sea Fleet. For instance, in 1993, just before the Massandra summit, Russia officially decided to reduce Ukraine's gas supplies by 25 per cent due to gas debts. However, it was widely believed to be an ultimatum, with Russia demanding that Ukraine hand over its share of the Black Sea Fleet and surrender all nuclear weapons in exchange for a reduction in its energy debt. Additionally, there was another incident where Russia raised the price of gas exports to Ukraine, exceeding the global market rate. This move was made in conjunction with an offer for Ukraine to join the CIS Customs Union in 1995 (Larsson, 2006, p. 202). Eventually, in May 1997, Russia decided to forgive Ukraine's USD1 billion debt in return for Ukraine agreeing to lease Sevastopol for twenty years as part of the bilateral agreements (Golani, 2011, p. 46). Besides this, Yeltsin consented to the split of the Black Sea Fleet, establishing two independent national fleets, and subsequently signed the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership, effectively settling the matter of Russia officially recognising Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Nonetheless, Yeltsin managed to secure a significant geopolitical benefit for Russia–Ukrainian neutrality.

As Article Six of the treaty outlines, both parties committed to refraining from actions that could jeopardise the security interests of the other party (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1997). This stipulation meant that if Ukraine were to join a foreign military alliance, it would be seen as a treaty violation, ultimately cancelling Russia's obligations (Golani, 2011, p. 41). However, as time has shown, this decision was only temporary and did not resolve the dispute; instead, it was postponed.

2.1.3. Cooperation on social issues

Finally, the republics had to cooperate on various social issues. The most significant one was the issue of ethnic minorities as a result of the policy of the ethnic settlements of the former Soviet Union. According to Shevtsova (1992): “many people in the former Soviet Union did not live in their republican homelands: more than 14 per cent of all Russians lived outside Russia. More than 15 per cent of all Ukrainians lived outside the Ukrainian SSR, and so on. As a result, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, every republic ended up with large enclaves of minorities” (Shevtsova, 1992, p. 14). Ukraine is no exception. Moreover, when Ukraine gained independence, it found itself with a substantial Russian-speaking population and a problem of Ukrainian self-identification.

Delving into the linguistic variations within Ukraine is crucial for grasping the essence of Ukrainian identity and discerning the key distinctions between eastern and western regions. The question of language is essential as it has always been controversial in Ukrainian modern history. Russian and Ukrainian are closely related, but significant phonological and lexical differences can make mutual understanding difficult unless the speaker has experience in both languages. In Ukraine, however, almost everyone has been exposed to, if not studied, both languages, resulting in widespread bilingualism. Those who cannot or choose not to speak both languages are usually passively bilingual, meaning they can understand the other language (Bilaniuk, 2005). It is also quite common in everyday life to talk in “surzhik”, a mixture of Ukrainian and Russian.

This linguistic peculiarity is deeply rooted and stems from Ukraine's Soviet past. Initially, Soviet authorities in the 1920s encouraged the growth of an educated and political class in Ukraine, assuming that these progressive Ukrainians would support the Soviet future (Snyder, 2014). Since the 1930s, under Stalin's rule, the emphasis on promoting national cultures gave way to the primary goal of rapid industrial development at any cost (Gitelman, 1994). The belief was that a shared language and shared historical narratives, even if artificially constructed, were more successful in uniting the diverse populations of the USSR than notions of class unity and economic considerations (Szporluk, 2020). Under Stalinism, non-Russian languages were not completely eradicated from public use but were primarily utilised in rural areas. While Russian-language schools became prevalent in Ukrainian cities, smaller towns and villages continued to use Ukrainian as the primary language of instruction (Szporluk, 2020). Thus, the Russian language was now considered a language of high culture. At the same time, Ukrainian was a language of villages, a language of uneducated masses and therefore inferior to Russian. This status of the Ukrainian language will remain in social circles and people's minds even after the independence of Ukraine.

Linguistic assimilation has not necessarily resulted in a change in identity. Although since the mid-1930s, the russification of Ukrainians has been taking place, many have refused to consider themselves Russian by nationality, even when they declare Russian as their native language (Szporluk, 1973). Such a Soviet policy ultimately, contrary to its goals, contributed to the development of Ukrainian self-identity. As Snyder (2014) rightly noted, although the Ukrainian language was viewed by many as a language of lower culture, it paradoxically maintained the status of a very high culture due to the presence of a unique Ukrainian tradition in the arts and humanities. According to the last census of Soviet Ukraine, conducted in 1989, it was found that 72.7 per cent of the population living in the Ukrainian SSR identified themselves as ethnic Ukrainians, while slightly over 22 per cent identified themselves as ethnic Russians. When asked about their native language, 12 per cent of ethnic Ukrainians indicated that their native language was Russian, while 65 per cent of ethnic Ukrainians predominantly spoke Ukrainian (Rapawy, 1997). The most recent population survey carried out in Ukraine took place

in 2001. Findings disclosed that 77.8 per cent of the Ukrainian population identified themselves as ethnically Ukrainian, while 17.3 per cent identified themselves as ethnically Russian. Interestingly, only 67.5 per cent of citizens considered Ukrainian their native language, and 29.6 per cent – Russian (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, 2001). These results indicate that many Ukrainians consider themselves ethnic Ukrainians while identifying their native language as Russian. Therefore, for many Ukrainians, belonging to the nation is determined not by language but by ethnicity.

The language issue became a stumbling block in relations between Russia and Ukraine as early as the 1990s. In 1993, the Russian Military Doctrine stated that the Russian Federation would protect Russian citizens living abroad. This was followed by the implementation of the 1994 presidential decree on compatriots living abroad. Russia's strategy was to grant dual citizenship to ethnic Russians or Russian-speaking nationals within the CIS. As a result, Russia gained significant political influence over Ukraine, which was home to eleven million ethnic Russians (Golani, 2011). Moreover, after gaining independence, Ukraine had around 30 per cent of its population speaking Russian, many of whom did not consider themselves ethnically Russian. As a result, Russian politics posed security and sovereignty risks to Ukraine from the beginning of its independence. This was a way for Russia to exert influence over post-Soviet countries by using political, economic, and social factors, including the presence of ethnically Russian and Russian-speaking minorities in most of the post-Soviet countries. This was particularly relevant in the case of Ukraine.

2.1.4. The east-west division in Ukraine

The political landscape in Ukraine is distinctive due to noticeable disparities in ethnic composition, language preferences, and even political orientations in the eastern and western regions of the country. The origins of the East-West split are firmly rooted in history. In 1654, the Pereyaslav Agreement was signed between the Zaporozhian Cossacks and the Russian Tsar, marking a pivotal moment in Ukrainian history. It divided Ukraine into

two semi-autonomous regions: one on the right bank of the Dniro (under Polish control) and one on the left bank (under the Russian Empire) (Encyclopedia Britannica). After the final partition of Poland in 1795, the central and western parts of what is now Ukraine came under the control of the Russian Empire, with the exception of Galicia, Bukovina and Transcarpathia, which became part of the Habsburg Empire (Karacsonyi et al., 2014). By the end of the 19th century, the Russian Empire had gained control over most of present-day Ukraine, including Crimea (Krasnikov, 2018). As a result, eastern and central Ukraine experienced centuries of Russian rule, first under the Russian Empire and later under the Soviet Union (Kychak, 2020). The eastern regions also experienced significant immigration from Russia and other parts of the USSR as the mining industry developed, resulting in the emergence of a substantial Russian minority in the region. By contrast, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Poland ruled western Ukraine and only became part of the Soviet Union after the Second World War (Bilaniuk, 2005). Given this historical background, western Ukraine is predominantly Catholic, while eastern Ukraine is primarily Orthodox. This religious divide also contributes to the country's regional differences (Samokhvalov, 2005). Crimea, as mentioned previously, did not lay within the borders of Ukraine until 1954—it is thus the area which is a part of Ukraine for the shortest time (Skrukwa, 2011). Notably, most Ukrainians who lived under the rule of the Russian Empire and later the USSR only had brief experiences of democracy following the events of 1905 and 1917 (Wilson, 2014). Hence, the eastern region of Ukraine has been influenced by Russia for a more extended period, resulting in stronger connections with Russia than with western Ukraine. The eastern part of the country also shows less affiliation with western culture and democratic values. These factors have significantly contributed to Ukraine's social division between the East and the West today.

Since Ukraine gained independence, political and ideological differences have significantly shaped regional dynamics within the country. The most dominant political parties in western Ukraine were those with democratic and ultra-nationalist ideologies, fueled by a strong anti-Communist sentiment in the region. This sentiment directly reflected the deep-seated nationalism that had long been present in the area, stemming from a tradition of resistance

against Soviet influence and the relatively short period of Communist rule in the region. Conversely, in eastern and southern Ukraine, where national identity was not as strong and Communist rule had been entrenched for a longer period, there was widespread support for Communist ideals (Subtelny, 2009). Thus, it was western Ukraine, known for its strong nationalism and greater political activism compared to eastern Ukraine, that played a key role in achieving Ukraine's independence (Samokhvalov, 2005). Ukrainians in various regions remain significantly fractured due to the absence of a unified historical narrative. The elections in Ukraine since 1991 have consistently revisited themes of national identity, language, and foreign policy alignment. Political leaders in Ukraine exploit these divisive topics to secure power (Wilson, 2014).

To sum up, following Ukraine's independence, due to the absence of a shared national identity, tensions between the pro-western and pro-Russian camps increased. The issues central to discussions on Ukraine's sovereignty - its relationship with Russia and the language spoken by the Ukrainian people - have evolved into highly politicised topics. These matters have been exploited during presidential campaigns since Ukraine's independence, further exacerbating societal divisions. Instead of bridging the gap between the western and eastern regions by seeking common ground, political leaders have capitalised on these divisions to consolidate power for many years. Politicians have extensively exploited the language dilemma to advance their populist agendas. During election campaigns, presidents often focused on language issues to win votes from either western or eastern Ukraine. They also promised closer integration with either Russia or the West to attract voters. However, their actions upon assuming office did not always align with their campaign promises. Once in power, presidents typically attempted to maintain a balanced relationship between Russia and the West and adopted a cautious approach. The language question has served as a significant catalyst for two notable revolutions in Ukraine's recent history: the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity in 2013. This issue will be thoroughly examined in the upcoming sections.

2.1.5. Ukraine and the EU in the 1990s

Since gaining independence, European integration has been one of the national priorities of Ukraine. However, partnership with the EU has developed unevenly, with Ukraine trying to balance its desire to have stronger economic ties with the European Union while minimising the social and political tensions with Russia due to the shared history.

In the 1990s, the Ukrainian system exhibited a considerably more balanced structure than the Russian one. Notably, Ukraine became the pioneer among the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in holding democratic elections for both the president and the parliament in 1994. In contrast to the Russian Constitution (1993), which facilitated a gradual shift towards authoritarianism by endowing the president with extensive powers, the Ukrainian Constitution (1996) embodied a negotiated compromise between the president and the parliament. Furthermore, unlike the situation in Russia, Ukraine boasted a significantly stronger political opposition. This fact was extensively acknowledged and valued by the West. In 1994, Ukraine became the first republic of the former USSR to sign the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the European Union (Haran, 2022). However, in the 1990s, there has been no real progress in Ukraine-EU relations.

In sum, independent Ukraine faced numerous internal and external challenges due to its Soviet history, encompassing economic, social, and political issues. Throughout the 1990s, the country's focus on establishing its social and political identity took precedence over economic development, leading to a period of turmoil and crisis. Given Ukraine's complex political and economic climate during this time, establishing strong relations with the EU was not a primary concern for the country. Moreover, due to Ukrainian history and because most of the territories of present-day Ukraine have been under the control of the Russian Empire since 1648 and consequently a part of the Soviet Union, such long historical ties between these two countries have led to the necessity for Ukraine to build relationships with Russia.

2.2. Ukraine between the EU and Russia from 1991 until 2025

Due to the Soviet legacy, Ukraine inherited a political culture with a problematic power distribution among the different branches of government. Moreover, the presidents of Ukraine have tended to concentrate power in their own hands. Political parties were created as short-term electoral projects rather than as organisations that aimed at competitive rotation through leadership positions (Odarchenko, 2020). The new state of Ukraine, with its society deeply divided, was prone to be taken over by oligarchic clans. It has been consistently difficult to form unified governments with clear reform agendas, or even to build coalitions strong enough to challenge the power of the country's predatory elites (Wilson, 2014, p.39). However, Ukraine stands out in the former Soviet space, except for the Baltic countries, due to its regular change of power. Since 1991, every ruling party has been defeated, except for 1999, when Kuchma managed to retain power for one more term (Hrytsak, 2010). Furthermore, Ukrainian presidents have been central figures in the two significant revolutions during Ukraine's independence - the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity. Therefore, examining the changes in the Ukrainian political landscape is vital, focusing on the presidents and the changes that occurred during their tenure.

Due to the fragility of the Ukrainian government, the presence of corrupt elites, and the superficial nature of their European aspirations, Ukrainian presidents have long played a delicate balancing game between Russia and the West. This strategic manoeuvre allowed them to secure resources from both sides while avoiding implementing necessary reforms. Known as 'multi-vectored' foreign policy, this approach granted Ukrainian leaders flexibility and autonomy, enabling them to avoid committing fully to either Russia or the EU (Wilson, 2014, p.15). Although each president had their interpretation of this policy, the overarching strategy remained consistent - maintaining a balanced foreign policy approach. This allowed Ukraine to navigate complex geopolitical challenges while retaining a sense of independence. Moreover, the foreign policy orientations of the government of the day directly impacted the formation of a national language policy. The lack of a stable state language policy has often been used by political groups to create contradictory and

hostile sentiments in Ukrainian society and to divert society's attention from economic and social problems. This chapter will provide a detailed analysis of Ukrainian presidents' different approaches to foreign policy and language policy.

2.2.1. Ukraine's policy during the presidency of Kravchuk (1991 – 1994)

The first president of Ukraine, Kravchuk, was a typical former apparatchik. His policy concentrated on “state-building”, which meant centralising power rather than building real grassroots democracy. His economic policy did not aim to create an actual market economy (Wilson, 2014, p. 41). Kravchuk's presidency is associated not only with Ukraine's independence and the creation of the CIS but also with the beginning of Ukraine's integration into European structures (Morar, 2008). Hence, already under Kravchuk's leadership, Ukraine adopted the strategy of balancing between Russia and the West. In July 1993, the Ukrainian Parliament approved Key Foreign Policy Guidelines (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1993) outlining a "special partnership" with Russia. Ukraine also set its sights on joining the Council of Europe, a goal realised by the end of 1995. Furthermore, membership in European Communities and other western and all-European organisations was seen as a potential objective as long as it did not conflict with Ukraine's national interests (Utkin, 2019).

Although Kravchuk won the first round of the 1991 elections with 61 per cent of the vote and united all of Ukraine (Figure 4), this initial unity did not last long. Despite the majority of the population from all regions of Ukraine, except the three western ones, voting for Kravchuk, the country was soon hit by disappointment. After gaining independence, there was great hope for economic prosperity, but Ukraine was gripped by a financial crisis a year later. This crisis only served to emphasise the social differences among Ukraine's regions.

1991

56.13

51.66 53.07 77.59 44.15 72.35

58.03 75.86 57.45 75.46 65.99 75.05 60.85 76.23

43.56 72.34 67.14 74.77 69.74 71.47

70.69 72.33 74.73 70.23 56.68 54.68

Leonid Kravchuk

Viacheslav Chornovil

Already in 1992, there has been a stark contrast in the population's attitudes towards the new Ukrainian state and its policies between the West and the East of Ukraine. western and Central Ukraine have shown more vigorous support for the newly established state's independence and reforms. On the other hand, the Russified population of the East and the South has displayed a different attitude. Being residents of a highly industrialised region, they have been significantly affected by the economic crisis, particularly in large enterprises. The limited and cautious efforts of the Kyiv authorities in 1992-1993 to implement the 1989 law on the state status of the Ukrainian language sparked mobilisation among the Russian-speaking population, who were concerned about the rise of "Ukrainian nationalism." Consequently, according to polls, support for Ukrainian independence in 1994 was minimal in this region, with 30 to 60 per cent of the population opposing it. Their demands were not for further acceleration of reforms but rather for a return to state socialism and the Soviet Union (Hrytsak, 2000, p. 5-237).

69

corruption and misconduct among government officials exacerbated the existing issues. The leadership failed to address critical matters concerning the fundamental problems of state formation, and a severe economic crisis plagued the country. With more than half of the population of Ukraine living below the poverty line, the situation was dire (Morar, 2008). As a result, in 1994, early elections were triggered by protests in cities of eastern Ukraine in 1993 (Wilson, 2014, p. 42).

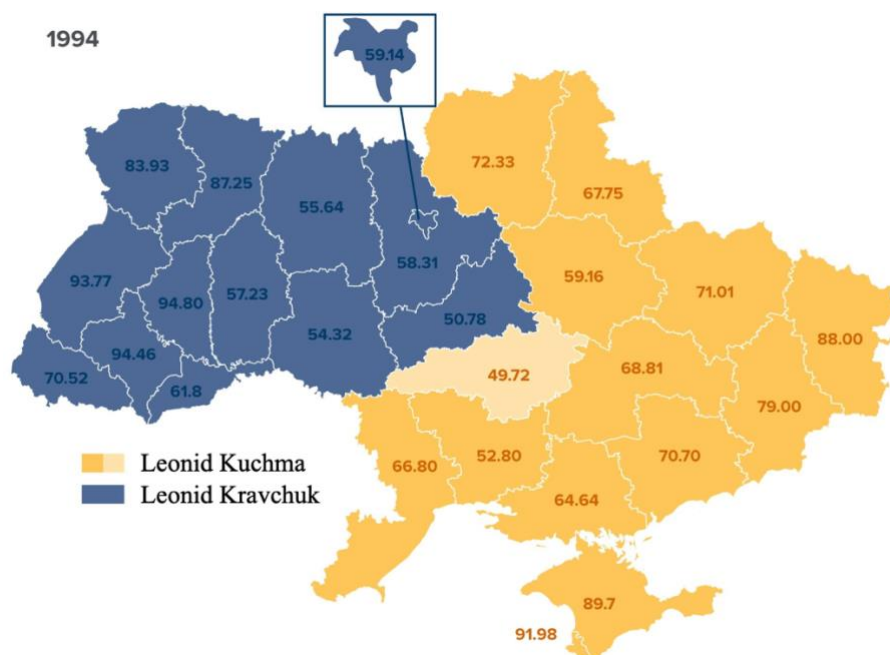
2.2.2. Ukraine's policy during the presidency of Kuchma (1994 – 2005)

Leonid Kuchma, a former director of a major missile factory in Dnipropetrovsk, was elected as the second president of Ukraine. Kravchuk secured 45 per cent of the votes in the western and central regions, while Kuchma emerged victorious with 52 per cent in the east and south (Wilson, 2014, p. 42). Kravchuk's pre-election program put forward the postulates of cooperation and economic union with Russia, as well as granting the Russian language the status of an official language. Intimidated by Kuchma's pre-election statements, practically all Ukrainian-speaking population voted for Kravchuk, some out of sincere conviction and some as the "lesser evil." Russian-speaking southern and eastern regions supported Kuchma, ensuring his victory in the second round of the presidential elections on July 10, 1994 (Hrytsak, 2000). This election highlighted the political divide between the east and west of the country, as political leaders strategically sought to gain voters' support in either region to secure their victory (Figure 5).

Nevertheless, during his presidency, Kuchma repeatedly emphasised the importance of eliminating the east-west division in Ukraine. Moreover, on June 28, 1996, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine officially approved the nation's new constitution, which reasserted Ukrainian as the sole official language (Panter, 2023). The 10th article of the 1996 Ukrainian Constitution clearly stated: "Ukraine guarantees the free development, use and protection of Russian and other languages of national minorities of Ukraine" (*The Constitution of Ukraine*, 1996). Furthermore, Ukraine has ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the

European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (Panter, 2023). In this way, Ukraine made efforts to establish Ukrainian as the official state language while also protecting the rights of national minorities to prevent potential conflicts with Russia due to the significant Russian minority in Ukraine. The decision to introduce Ukrainian as the sole state language was an unexpected move by Kuchma, contradicting his pre-election rhetoric. This emphasises that political elites actively exploited the language issue to gain power, further deepening the division between the eastern and western regions.

Figure 5. Results of the 1994 presidential elections in Ukraine



Source: Barkar & Petruk (2019)

Kuchma navigated a balanced foreign policy by establishing agreements with the European Union, the United States, NATO, and Russia (Wilson, 2014). For instance, on 11 June 1998, President Kuchma approved by decree the "On the Approval of the Strategy for Ukraine's Integration into the European Union", which defined integration into the EU as a strategic goal (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1998). Meanwhile, in October 2000, President

Kuchma proposed giving Gazprom a stake in Ukraine's gas pipeline system in exchange for the country's gas debt to Russia (Wolczuk, 2014). Moreover, Putin's first trip abroad as an elected president was to Kyiv, which demonstrates how important Ukraine was for Russian security interests from the start of Putin's presidency (Golani, 2011, p. 47, 51). However, just two years later, in May 2002, President Kuchma declared the country's willingness to join NATO (NATO, 2015). NATO and Ukraine established a NATO-Ukraine Action Plan to set goals for political and military reform. Under Kuchma, however, Ukraine's slow progress on these reforms rendered the initiative largely ineffective (Woehrel, 2005, p.6).

During Kuchma's presidency, Ukraine's political landscape was controlled by the oligarchic clans that backed him. Each clan established its political party to solidify its influence: the Kyiv clan, led by Medvedchuk, formed the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine; the Donetsk clan, headed by Akhmetov, founded the Party of Regions; and Viktor Pinchuk from the Dnipropetrovsk clan supported the Party of Labor. They also controlled the leading media to shape public opinion. With their immense financial resources, these oligarchs financed political campaigns and maintained considerable power within Ukraine's emerging pseudo-democratic system (Karatnycky, 2005). The oligarchs selected Viktor Yanukovich as their preferred candidate to succeed Kuchma (Woehrel, 2005). Yanukovich was a pro-eastern candidate and advocated the continuation of Kuchma's policies. He was, of course, a convenient candidate for the oligarchic clans. The main opposition candidate, former Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko (1999-2001), was, to the contrary, a pro-reform, pro-western figure.

On 21 November, after the second round of voting between the two leading candidates, the Central Election Commission declared Yanukovich the winner. However, independent election observers reported widespread fraud and abuse in Yanukovich's favour, including voter intimidation, ballot destruction, bribery, and media manipulation. The opposition believed that these tactics, along with other undemocratic practices, contributed to Yanukovich's claimed victory by a three-per cent margin. The massive fraud sparked public outrage, with hundreds of thousands of people protesting for

free and fair elections in what became known as the 'Orange Revolution', named after Yushchenko's campaign colour (Kurth & Kempe, 2005). Protesters blockaded government buildings in Kyiv and called for the Supreme Court of Ukraine to intervene and annul the election results. The court agreed to their demands, recognising the fraud and calling a rerun for 26 December (Woehrel, 2005). In the re-run, Yushchenko emerged victorious with 51.99 per cent of the vote to Yanukovych's 44.2 per cent (Central Election Commission of Ukraine, 2004). The next chapter of the dissertation will provide a deeper analysis of the Orange Revolution, examining the public sentiment and political context that led to it, as well as the results of the revolution.

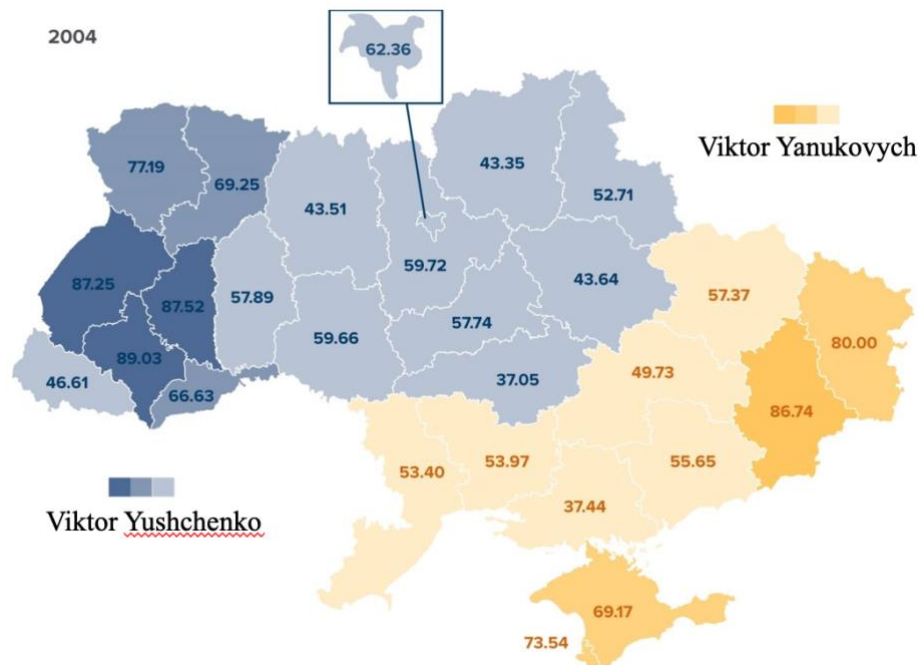
2.2.3. Ukraine's policy during the presidency of Yushchenko (2005 – 2010)

The Maidan protests of 2004 were driven by the utilitarian belief that the hopes and optimism for change in the 1990s had not been realised. The success of these protests raised hopes for Ukrainians and the West that the country would finally embark on comprehensive reforms, significant economic changes, and integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions. This belief was emphasised by the agenda of the pre-election campaign of the elected president, Yushchenko, who officially became president on 23 January 2005.

However, it would soon become evident that the revolution was not destined to bring the long-awaited economic prosperity and reformation process to Ukraine. This was because the price for Yushchenko's re-election involved controversial negotiations with the political elites of that time. For instance, Yushchenko agreed to change the constitution and reduce the powers of the future president after the next parliamentary elections in the spring of 2006. There was also a behind-the-scenes amnesty for those guilty of election falsification (Wilson, 2014). Moreover, during Yushchenko's presidency, tensions between Ukraine and Russia escalated, fuelled by issues such as the gas wars and Russia's dramatic increase in energy prices for Ukraine; disputes over the Black Sea Fleet, with the Ukrainian government declaring that the

lease would not be renewed after 2017; and Russia's security concerns over Ukraine's growing integration into NATO and the EU. The next chapter of the thesis will address these issues in more detail.

Figure 6. Results of the 2004 presidential re-elections in Ukraine



Source: Barkar & Petruk (2019)

Despite the hopes and enthusiastic support that brought millions to the Maidan, Viktor Yushchenko failed to meet their expectations. Yushchenko's weakness as a statesman was particularly evident in his handling of language policy. Many Ukrainians had envisioned him as a leader who would embrace a Ukrainian-centred vision and lead the country towards building a strong, democratic nation-state. In his inaugural speech as President of Ukraine in 2005, Viktor Yushchenko promised that "everyone can teach their children the language of the parent". He reassured that the use of Russian would not be restricted but also emphasised that Ukrainian would remain the sole state language (Ukrainska Pravda, 2005). However, despite his rhetoric advocating for Ukrainianization, there were no substantial changes to the status of the Ukrainian language at the state level. In 2006, a group of legal experts and linguists at the Ministry of Justice developed the Concept of State Language Policy, which emphasised the vital principle that "a threat to the Ukrainian

language is a direct threat to the national security of Ukraine and to the very existence of the Ukrainian nation and state". In July 2006, the proposal was presented to Yushchenko, along with a recommendation to approve it and establish a National Council for Language Policy under the presidency. Despite receiving the Concept, Yushchenko initially postponed any decision. It was not until 15 February 2010 - three and a half years later and at the very end of his term - that he approved the document by decree (Masenko, 2016). However, this delayed approval had little tangible impact on the status of the Ukrainian language, as it did not lead to any significant changes or advances in its use at the state level.

Although the Orange Revolution initially inspired optimism both within Ukraine and among western institutions, fostering the belief that Ukraine had turned a crucial corner and was on the path to democratic reform, internal divisions and personal rivalries - especially between President Yushchenko and Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, the two central figures of the revolution - hampered the implementation of the agreed reform agenda. These conflicts stalled progress on domestic reforms and hindered Ukraine's closer integration into Euro-Atlantic structures (Larrabee, 2010). At the same time, Yushchenko's pro-western policies were strongly opposed by Russia, which used its political leverage and gas disputes to punish Ukraine for its shift towards the West. Moreover, the events of 2004 did not signal a unified stance in Ukraine on EU accession. The population of eastern Ukraine continued to see the country's future development through closer ties with Russia. This was reflected in the 2010 election of Viktor Yanukovich as president, a candidate with strong pro-Russian sympathies (Kychak, 2020).

2.2.4. Ukraine's policy during the presidency of Yanukovich (2010 – 2014)

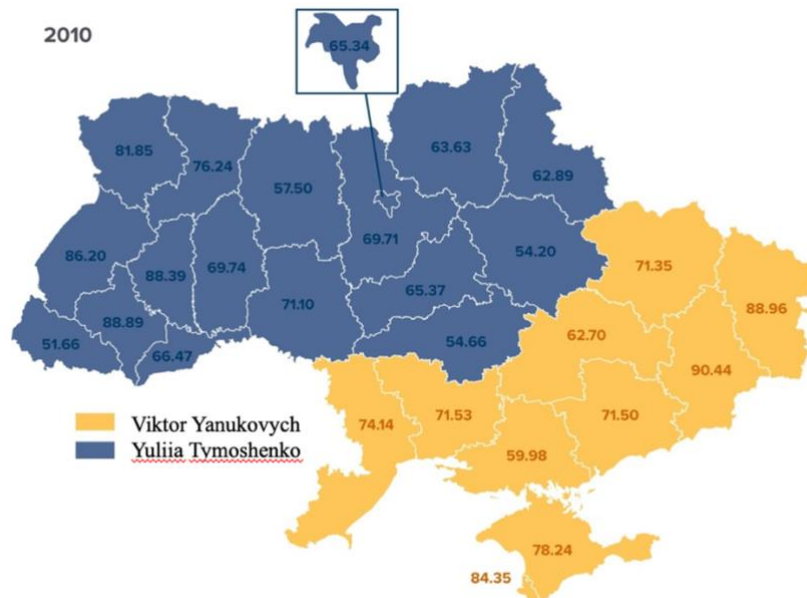
Viktor Yushchenko was succeeded by Viktor Yanukovich, whose efforts to falsify the 2004 election sparked the 2004 revolution. In 2010, however, Yanukovich won a relatively free and fair election (Wilson, 2014). Unlike the 2004 presidential election, where President Putin openly supported

Yanukovych and Russian political advisors played a behind-the-scenes role in supporting his candidacy, Russia did not actively intervene in the 2010 election (Larrabee, 2010). Yanukovych won the final run-off on February 7, 2010, by only 3.48 per cent of the vote. Yanukovych came to power by capitalising on the political crisis in Ukraine, the general disillusionment of citizens with the Ukrainian political system, and the outcome of the Orange Revolution. This was against the backdrop of the global economic crisis, which indirectly contributed to undermining Viktor Yushchenko's authority (Prykhodko, 2023). Moreover, Yanukovych's victory became possible partly due to Ukraine's east-west division. Since in 2004, the elections won a pro-western candidate and the result was not as successful as was hoped by Ukrainians, the population, especially in the eastern and southern regions, leaned to a pro-Russian candidate this time in the hope of better economic situation, reduction in gas prices and balancing relations with Russia. During the 2010 presidential election campaign, the language issue also became particularly relevant. Viktor Yanukovych secured support in the east, south and Crimea by promising to introduce dual Russian-Ukrainian citizenship and resolve the issue of Russian language status as a state language (Dvirna, 2022). Hence, the political division of Ukrainian society was still evident in the 2010 elections. Yanukovych, a pro-Russian candidate, had support from Ukraine's eastern and southern regions. On the other hand, Yulia Tymoshenko, his pro-western opponent, was backed by western and northern Ukraine (Figure 6). However, personal rivalries between President Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko played a significant role in her defeat, undermining her ability to secure support in central Ukraine (Larrabee, 2010).

The outcome of the 2010 Ukrainian elections altered Russia's perception of threat and influenced its foreign policy toward Ukraine. Yanukovych prioritised improving ties with Russia and strongly opposed Ukrainian membership in NATO. He also, in contrast to Yushchenko, supported the Russian invasion of Georgia as well as Russia's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Larrabee, 2010). In April 2010, Yanukovych signed the Kharkiv Agreements with Russia. These agreements extended the stay of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation in Sevastopol from 2017 to 2042, with a further extension for another 5 years. In return, Ukraine received

discounted rates on Russian natural gas (Prykhodko, 2023). Another measure was Yanukovych's declaration that Ukraine would not join any military alliance (Golani, 2011).

Figure 7. Results of the 2010 presidential elections in Ukraine



Source: Barkar & Petruk (2019)

However, Yanukovych conducted somewhat questionable interior politics. For instance, a highly regressive legal reform in the summer of 2010 gave the executive complete control over the judiciary. In September 2010, Yanukovych decided to revoke the 2004 constitutional reform that had established a system of checks and balances within the branches of government in Ukraine. Instead, he ordered a return to the 1996 Constitution, which granted the president extensive powers to appoint and dismiss ministers and effectively control all branches of government. This reinstated Ukraine's presidential-parliamentary form of government (Prykhodko, 2023). In 2011, the regime began imprisoning its political opponents, including Tymoshenko, his primary opponent in the 2010 presidential elections. She was accused of abusing her office concerning the January 2009 gas agreement with Russia. In October 2011, she was sentenced to seven years in prison and ordered to pay a fine of USD188 million. Tymoshenko's arrest in October 2011 led the EU to suspend the DCFTA negotiations. However, in December

2012 the EU outlined three sets of conditions relating to electoral, judicial and constitutional reforms for the resumption of talks, to be completed by the EU's eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius in November 2013 (Wilson, 2014).

In 2012, the "On the Principles of State Language Policy in Ukraine," also known as the Kivalov-Kolesnichenko language law, was enacted to enhance the presence of the Russian language across Ukraine, particularly in regions where Russian was commonly spoken in daily life. This law granted regional language status to Russian in half of Ukraine's territory and legalised its use. This concept is essentially the same as that of a "state language" since a "regional language" recognised in a given territory has the same rights as the state language (Kunch, 2016). Although the law did not diminish the status of Ukrainian as the sole state language, it expanded the usage of Russian in public domains, which had negative implications for the Ukrainian language (Panter, 2023). Therefore, during Yanukovych's presidency, relations with Russia deepened significantly, and the Russian language gained regional status in several regions. These developments naturally led to increased tensions within the population.

Public discontent peaked when Yanukovych rejected an Association Agreement with the EU in favour of a USD15 billion Russian counter-offer. This decision sparked widespread anti-government protests, which grew in intensity over the next three months. The demonstrations culminated in violent clashes that left more than 100 protesters dead (Mearsheimer, 2014). The decision also contradicted the demands of the 2004 Orange Revolution, when people demanded freedom of choice, democratic institutions and a European future. Although the Orange Revolution did not produce the expected results, its main undoubted success was slowing the system's inevitable slide towards autocracy (Eberhardt, 2009), an achievement undermined by Yanukovych's presidency. Once again, the Ukrainians' dreams of democratic state development did not come true. When Yanukovych did not sign the Association Agreement, it meant only one thing - rapprochement with Russia and further authoritarian development of the country, which outraged Ukrainians and provoked large-scale protests across the country.

Similar to the 2004 revolution, Russia perceived the situation in Ukraine from 2013 to 2014 as a threat. Russia was concerned about the potential expansion of NATO close to its borders and the prospect of losing control of the Black Sea Fleet. The revolution and the subsequent political crisis in Kyiv presented an opportunity for a significant geostrategic shift in Ukraine's peaceful development. After the victory of the Revolution of Dignity and President Viktor Yanukovich's overthrow, the parliament temporarily assumed power in Ukraine, led by the speaker of the Verkhovna Rada. During this period, the country was in a state of ideological and political instability, which Russia exploited to its advantage. This culminated in Russia's annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas. In the next chapter, the dissertation will deepen the analysis of the Euromaidan revolution, examining the social and political context that led to it and the consequences of the revolution for Ukraine's relations with the EU and Russia.

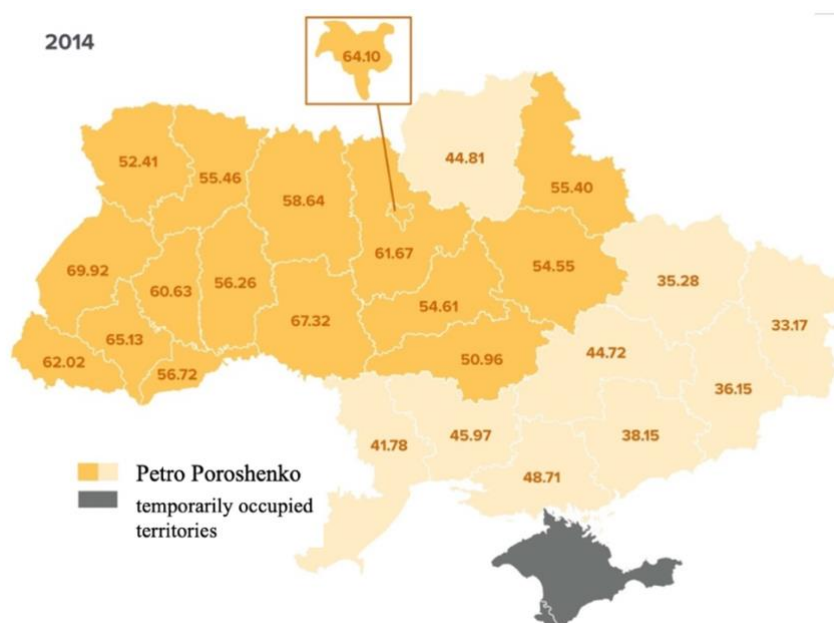
It is important to note, however, that although the Euromaidan Revolution ended tragically with the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of conflict in Donbas, it did accomplish one significant goal. The subsequent Russian assault in response to the revolution completely altered the attitude of Russian-speaking Ukrainians toward Russia, resulting in the development of a new Ukrainian paradigm of identity and the eradication of the persisting East-West divide. As the 2014 and 2019 elections showed, Ukrainians have become more united than ever in their views on the direction of the country's foreign policy and economic development.

2.2.5. Ukraine's policy under the presidency of Poroshenko (2014 – 2019)

Following Euromaidan, Petro Poroshenko was elected as the fifth president of Ukraine in June 2014. The presidential election was held in a single round, with Petro Poroshenko winning 54.7 per cent of the vote. Only twice in Ukraine's history has a presidential candidate won in the first round - once in 1991 and again in 2014. The main message of Petro Poroshenko during the 2014 presidential election was the slogan "Live in a new way". His

campaign focused on presenting him as a 'new politician', uniquely positioned as the face of Euromaidan and a supporter of the changes sought by Ukrainian society. In addition, Poroshenko was associated with security and a quick end to the war, embodied in the slogan "Choose peace - choose Poroshenko" (Zolotarova, 2021). All of these elements played a key role in his victory. As shown in Figure 7, Poroshenko received strong support mainly from western and northern Ukraine, the regions that were the driving force behind the Euromaidan revolution. But he also secured significant support in the eastern and southern regions. One of the main reasons for Poroshenko's quick victory in a single round and with strong support in most regions of Ukraine was his prominent role as one of the leaders of the Euromaidan, coupled with the external threat from Russia and the backdrop of the annexation of Crimea and pseudo-referendums held in parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions declaring the independence of these territories.

Figure 8. Results of the 2014 presidential elections in Ukraine



Source: Barkar & Petruk (2019)

The events mentioned above certainly influenced the policies pursued by Petro Poroshenko. His approach closely mirrored that of Viktor Yushchenko, as both presidents adopted pro-European rhetoric and focused on nation-building. However, while both came to power in the wake of revolutions,

Poroshenko's policies were more radical and unambiguously pro-European, driven mainly by the ongoing war in eastern Ukraine and the aggression of the Russian Federation.

Before 2014, Ukrainian presidents tried to balance Ukrainisation with the protection of minority languages, predominantly Russian. After Russia's aggression, this policy of balance became untenable. Therefore, during Poroshenko's presidency, large-scale Ukrainisation was initiated, and a number of laws on language policy were adopted. For example, the adoption of laws on Ukrainian language quotas in radio and television - "On Amendments to the Law of Ukraine "On Television and Radio Broadcasting"" of 2016 and "On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine on the Language of Audiovisual (Electronic) Mass Media" of 2017 (Kiss, 2020). Until 2016, Russian was the dominant language in entertainment and political programmes. National TV channels broadcast programmes where only the titles were in Ukrainian, while the presenters spoke Russian (Kunch, 2016). In both public communication and on television and radio programs, it was common for people to engage in non-reciprocal bilingual conversations. Each person spoke their preferred language, yet both understood each other. This practice helped to ease the potentially sensitive issue of language choice (Bilaniuk, 2005). As the media has one of the most powerful influences on public consciousness, these laws played a crucial role in raising the status of the Ukrainian language by mandating the use of Ukrainian in the country's media.

Another clear violation of the status of Ukrainian as the state language was the failure of Ukrainian government officials to comply with the provisions of Article 10 of the Constitution. For a long time, officials did not consider it necessary to use the Ukrainian language to carry out their official duties (Kunch, 2016). This problem was particularly pronounced during the Yanukovych era when neither President Yanukovych nor Prime Minister Mykola Azarov could communicate in Ukrainian properly during official interactions. In 2019, Poroshenko signed a new language law, "On Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language," effectively ending such practices among officials. However, unlike the

Ukrainisation efforts of the 1990s, the new laws introduced under Poroshenko included sanctions for non-compliance or violations. They also paved the way for the establishment of several language-related institutions, such as the National Commission on State Language Standards and the Commissioner for the Protection of the State Language (Kiss, 2020).

Poroshenko's presidency was also marked by the unification of Ukrainian Orthodoxy and the establishment of Ukrainian autocephaly. In 2018, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine was established, signifying a historic separation from Russia (BBC, 2018). On 6 January 2019, the Patriarch of Constantinople granted Poroshenko a document (tomos) recognising the newly established Orthodox Church of Ukraine as the only legitimate and independent Orthodox Church in Ukraine. It is significant that Poroshenko's political move, less than a year before the upcoming presidential elections, was strategically aimed at his core constituency - central and western Ukraine, where the decision received broad support. This may have alienated his voters in the eastern and southern regions. But these areas were never his main electoral base. (see Figure 8). By adopting a more nationalist platform, with autocephaly from Russia as a central element, Poroshenko sought to consolidate his support in western and central Ukraine ahead of the election (Nicolai, 2019). Thus, during Poroshenko's presidency, Ukraine's East-West divide has been strategically exploited for electoral gain. In this instance, Poroshenko used the country's religious divide to ensure his victory in the 2019 presidential election.

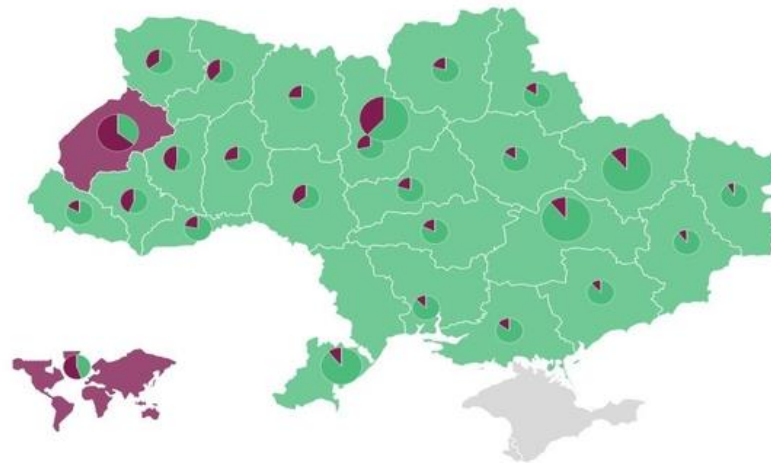
Most importantly, President Poroshenko has set a clear course for Ukraine's European integration as a central pillar of the country's foreign policy. On 27 June, Poroshenko signed the Association Agreement, securing closer ties with the EU. Petro Poroshenko was the first president of Ukraine who did not pursue a multi-vector political approach. The annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine left no room for such a policy. His approach was exclusively pro-western and anti-Russian. Therefore, it can be claimed that with the beginning of Poroshenko's presidency, a continuity of foreign policy emerged, reflecting the state's commitment to a consistent political course, regardless of the dynamics of the presidential elections.

2.2.6. Ukraine's policy during the presidency of Zelenskyi (2019 – now)

Zelenskyi, a former showman, came to power in the spring of 2019 with the support of 73 per cent of voters from diverse backgrounds across Ukraine. He wasn't a career politician, his team lacked experienced diplomats and activists, and his political agenda was vague and heavily populist (Minakov, 2022). Zelenskyi's victory was a protest by the Ukrainian population against the old-style politicians who failed to fulfil their pre-election promises (see Table 2). Despite the Euromaidan Revolution, there has been no significant change in the political landscape, with the same corrupt elites and the ongoing war in the Donbas region, which Poroshenko had promised to end "in a matter of hours" (Holubov, 2019). In June 2018, the Democratic Initiatives Foundation and the Razumkov Center conducted a pre-election survey. According to the study, most citizens (62 per cent) believed Ukraine needs new political leaders (Ilko Kucheriv «Democratic Initiatives» Foundation, 2018). Thus, it can also be argued that many people voted for Zelenskyi simply because they did not want to vote for already-known political leaders – Poroshenko or Tymoshenko, the primary opponents of Zelenskyi. With the election of Zelenskyi, the country's presidency was for the first time in the hands of a person untainted by corruption, oligarchy, or Russian alliances (Moravcsik & Emmons, 2021). With two unsuccessful revolutions behind them, Ukrainians were still desperate for change.

Zelenskyi was the first president since Kravchuk's victory in 1991 to be supported by a majority of the population in all regions of Ukraine except Lviv Oblast in the west (Figure 9), with the highest levels of support coming from southern and eastern Ukraine (Ukrainska Pravda, 2019). Thus, during the presidential elections of 2019, Ukraine was united for the first time, with no east-west division this time.

Figure 9. Results of the 2019 presidential elections in Ukraine



Source: Ukrainska Pravda (2019)

The middle and creative classes primarily drove Volodymyr Zelenskyi's rise to power. During the campaign, office owners, designers, IT specialists and café owners offered their services for free, while others donated money to support the cause. The people united to help a “man of the people” defeat an experienced politician, which was unprecedented in Ukrainian history. After Zelenskyi's victory, many from the middle and creative classes, including former entrepreneurs, designers, architects and journalists, entered politics, running for local and parliamentary office (Trushevykh, 2024). This influx of new faces into the Verkhovna Rada marked a significant shift in Ukraine's political landscape, fuelling hopes for real change and eliminating the corruption associated with the Soviet past.

Even before the full-scale invasion, Zelenskyi controlled all three branches of power. In his first one hundred days, he secured early parliamentary elections and established a one-party majority in the Verkhovna Rada, which none of Ukraine's previous presidents had achieved (Minakov, 2022). However, the Russian invasion and imposition of martial law led to an unprecedented centralisation of power. The next presidential election, scheduled for March 2024, was postponed due to Part 1 of Article 19 of the Law of Ukraine, "On the Legal Regime of Martial Law", which prohibits presidential elections during martial law. As a result, President Zelenskyi's

term of office remains legal and valid until the end of martial law (Trushevykh, 2024). Nevertheless, Ukrainian experts widely believe there will be no monopolisation of authority (Haran & Burkovskyi, 2022).

During the term of President Volodymyr Zelenskyi, the policy of Ukrainisation continued. On 16 January 2021, Article 30 of the Language Law came into force, requiring all service providers in Ukraine to communicate with customers exclusively in the state language unless the consumer requests explicitly communication in another language. This applies to businesses such as supermarkets, online shops, cafes, banks, petrol stations, pharmacies and others. However, information can be provided in any other language at the customer's request (Dvirna, 2022). Moreover, with the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022, the process of Ukrainisation intensified across the country, supported mainly by Ukrainian society. This development will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

Volodymyr Zelenskyi's presidency was marked by numerous challenges, ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, which brought a range of additional difficulties. These included severe disruptions to the energy sector due to missile strikes on critical infrastructure, population mobilisation, and many other pressing issues. The war profoundly impacted Zelenskyi's politics and approach to governance, shaping his policy choices and governmental preferences. This will be analysed in detail in the next chapter.

To summarise, popular support for Ukrainian independence was primarily motivated by utilitarian motifs among the Ukrainians and a shared conviction in Ukraine's economic prosperity once it gained independence, given its rich lands and developed agriculture sector. However, once independent, Ukraine faced a harsh reality: the 1990s financial crisis and massive interdependence with other post-Soviet republics, particularly its reliance on Russian gas and oil supplies. Unlike the Baltic states, Ukraine had no choice but to engage with Russia in various fields. For years, Ukrainian leaders pursued a "balanced" foreign policy, attempting to maintain contacts with Russia while strengthening ties with the European Union. At the same time, with the change of political forces and elites and changes in foreign policy, there has

been a reorientation of language policy. Due to the state's complex past, the northwest-southeast division in independent Ukraine was exploited by political elites for years and employed in their political rhetoric and pre-election campaigns.

Table 2. Comparison of pre-election campaigns of the presidents of Ukraine and their foreign policy approach

President	Pre-election campaign	Foreign Policy approach	Language Policy
Kravchuk (1991 – 1994)	Independent Ukraine; Ukrainisation	“balanced”	Cautious Ukrainisation, which faced resistance from Russian-speaking population
Kuchma (1994 – 2005)	Russian-oriented; granting Russian the status of an official language	“balanced”	New constitution reaffirms Ukrainian as sole official language
Yushchenko (2005 – 2010)	western-oriented, Ukrainisation	“balanced”	Passive Ukrainisation, weak language policy
Yanukovych (2010 – 2014)	Russian-oriented, granting Russian the status of a state language	“balanced”	Kivalov-Kolesnichenko language law - granted regional language status to Russian
Poroshenko (2014 – 2019)	pro-western and anti-Russian; Ukrainisation	pro-western and anti-Russian	Ukrainisation
Zelenskyi (2019 – now)	pro-western and anti-Russian; Ukrainisation	pro-western and anti-Russian	Ukrainisation

Source: own construction

As Table 2 shows, politicians have used the East-West divide and the language issue to gain support by targeting the votes of particular regions or linguistic minorities. Once in power, however, they often adopted a completely different approach. This shift alternated between efforts at

Ukrainisation and strengthening the status of the Ukrainian language, on the one hand, and promoting the interests of the Russian language and protecting minority languages, on the other. These inconsistent policies only deepened social divisions and fuelled widespread disillusionment among the population. As a result, Ukraine has experienced two revolutions that helped shape a new national identity. Ironically, it was only after the Euromaidan revolution and the onset of Russian aggression in 2014, which coincided with Poroshenko's presidency, that Ukraine's foreign policy began to consolidate. A decisive commitment to a consistent political and language policy and gradual progress towards Ukrainisation marked this period. But this progress came at the heavy cost of an ongoing full-scale war with Russia.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE ORANGE AND EUROMAIDAN REVOLUTIONS THROUGH THE LENS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION THEORIES

This chapter examines Ukraine's integration into the EU through the prism of a Liberal Intergovernmentalism. It focuses on two key events - the Orange and Euromaidan revolutions. These two revolutions led to the final formation of Ukraine's national preferences regarding European integration. The analysis is structured around three stages of Liberal Intergovernmentalism: the formation of national preferences, intergovernmental negotiations and institutionalisation. This framework allows for a detailed study of the dynamics of Ukraine-EU relations and illustrates how these causal mechanisms influenced the process of Ukraine's European integration. In particular, detailed attention is paid to the relationship between society and political parties during these revolutions and how this interaction influenced the formation of national interests regarding European integration.

3.1. Orange Revolution

The eastward enlargement of the EU with 12 new member states between 2004 and 2007 effectively led to a geopolitical shift and a change in the foreign policy preferences of Ukraine, Russia and the EU. As a result, Ukraine became a buffer zone where Russian influence was increasingly weakened, but western influence was not yet dominant. These geopolitical processes led to internal unrest in Ukraine, known as the Orange Revolution. The 2004 presidential elections were a crucial turning point that could have led Ukraine either towards Euro-Atlantic institutions or into a Russian sphere of influence (Woehrel, 2005). The trigger for the 2004 revolution was people's outrage at widespread electoral fraud, with the authorities distorting the actual figures by 10-12 per cent, which was later revealed during the re-vote on December 26 (Sushko & Lisnychuk, 2005), and Russia's interference in the election process (Wilson, 2014). In 2004, Ukrainians gathered on the Maidan to defend their right to choose their president and the foreign policy direction for the state.

International observers strongly criticised the election process, including the campaign and both rounds of voting, labelling them as lacking in freedom and fairness. They pointed out several issues, such as biased government media supporting Yanukovych, the misuse of absentee ballots, the exclusion of opposition members from election commissions, and inaccuracies in voter lists. On 21 November, after a second round, the Central Election Commission declared Yanukovych the winner (Woehrel, 2005). The opposition believed that massive fraud, along with other undemocratic practices, contributed to Yanukovych's claimed victory by a three-per cent margin. As a result, thousands of Ukrainians demonstrated against the falsification of the election results in what became known as the "Orange Revolution", named after Yushchenko's campaign colour. They blocked government buildings in Kyiv and appealed to Ukraine's Supreme Court to invalidate the vote. The Supreme Court of Ukraine unanimously decided to annul the results of the 21 November elections. In the second round on 26 December 2004, Viktor Yushchenko won by a clear margin of almost eight

per cent, marking a victory for democracy and giving Ukraine a chance for change and a European future (Kurth & Kempe, 2005).

Table 3. Results of the presidential elections in Ukraine, 2004. Data in per cent,

Main Candidates	First round, 31.10.2004	Second round, 24.11.2004	Repetition of the second round, 26.12.2004
Yushchenko	39.90	46.61	51.99
Yanykovych	39.26	49.46	44.20

Source: own edition based on Central Electoral Commission of Ukraine, Kurth & Kempe (2005).

The events of autumn 2004 marked a change in Ukraine's foreign policy orientation and the emergence of national preferences for European integration. The revolution brought a pro-western candidate to power for the first time in independent Ukraine. Although the revolution was not as successful as many had hoped and was primarily driven by domestic rather than foreign policy issues, it is essential to include these events in the analysis of Ukraine's European integration process. The revolution became the starting point for Ukraine's reorientation towards the EU. Moreover, relations between Russia and Ukraine began to stagnate after the Orange Revolution.

3.1.1. National Preferences Formation

Society Preferences

The Orange Revolution was led by supporters of the main opposition candidate, Viktor Yushchenko, who had strong support from western and central Ukraine. After the Central Election Commission declared Viktor Yanukovych the winner on 21 November 2004, the movement began in response to the massive vote rigging that tainted the election results (Kennan Institute, 2005).

Table 4. Difference between exit polls and official election results (1999-2014)

	Candidates	National exit poll data, per cent	Official election results, per cent	Compliance of the results, per cent
1999	Kuchma	59,8	56,2	-6,02
	Symonenko	35,3	37,8	7,08
2004	Yushchenko	52,9	46,6	-11,91
	Yanukovych	44,2	49,5	11,99
2004 (re-elections)	Yushchenko	55,3	52	-5,97
	Yanukovych	40,1	44,2	10,22
2010	Yanukovych	48,4	48,9	1,03
	Tymoshenko	45,7	45,5	-0,44
2014	Poroshenko	55,9	54,7	-2,15
2019	Zelenskyi	73	73,22	0,30
	Poroshenko	25,5	24,45	-4,12

Source: own edition based on Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (2019); Slovo i Dilo, (2019)

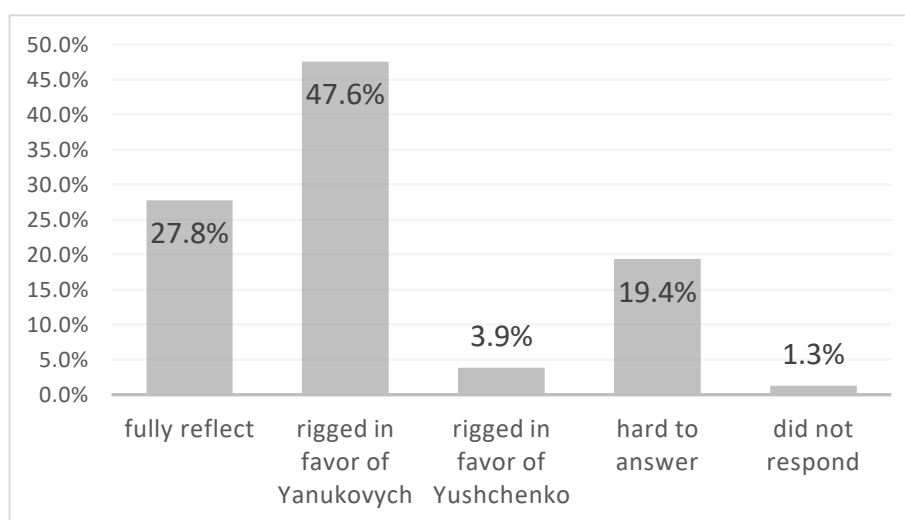
In emerging democracies, one of the primary purposes of exit polls is to validate official election results and prevent the authorities from falsifying vote counts (Kharchenko & Paniotto, 2010). In general, the electoral process in Ukraine is marked by a significant overlap between exit polls and official election results (Table 4). This data generally indicates democratic and transparent elections in Ukraine, showing that the broader electorate openly expresses its political preferences. The difference between the exit polls and the results of the 2004 elections caused public dissatisfaction and led to the Orange Revolution that year.

In the second round of Ukraine's presidential election on 21 November, independent exit polls showed Viktor Yushchenko leading with 52.9 per cent of the vote to Viktor Yanukovych's 44.2 per cent. However, official results showed Yanukovych had almost a 3 per cent lead (Table 3.1). The Central

Election Commission initially reported that turnout in Ukraine's Russian-speaking eastern regions was in line with the national average of 78 to 80 per cent. However, later updates showed a dramatic increase in turnout, particularly in Donetsk (from 78 per cent to 96.2 per cent overnight) and Luhansk (from 80 per cent to 89.5 per cent). This surge, with overwhelming support for Yanukovych, resulted in an estimated 1.2 million additional votes, giving him a lead of 800,000 votes. Such an unexpected and sharp increase has raised serious concerns and allegations of electoral fraud and manipulation (Karatnycky, 2005).

As a result, according to a Razumkov poll conducted in late November 2004 after the second round of the elections, 47.6 per cent of respondents were convinced that the polls had been rigged in Yanukovych's favour.

Figure 10. To what extent do the results of the second round of elections reflect the will of the voters? Data in per cent, November 2004

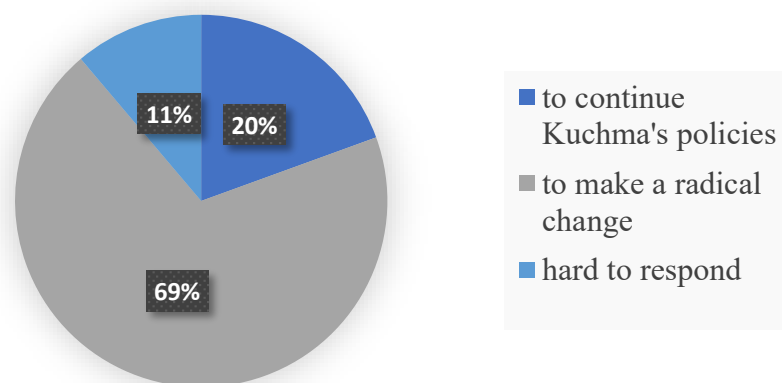


Source: own construction based on Razumkov Centre (2004)

The events of the Orange Revolution, from October 22 to December 8, 2004, were driven by the Ukrainian people's aspiration to exercise their democratic right to freely elect their government without Russian interference in the electoral process. Although the Orange Revolution was associated with Yushchenko's election campaign, the colour orange symbolised society's unwavering determination to defend its right to self-government (Karatnycky, 2005). Consequently, a significant number of protesters prevented

Yanukovych's planned inauguration (Wilson, 2014). Demonstrations in Kyiv's Independence Square drew over 200,000–300,000 people daily, and a tent city on Khreshchatyk became the centre of the protest (Sushko & Lisnychuk, 2005). This mass mobilisation led the Supreme Court to annul the election results and order a new vote, which ultimately resulted in a victory for Viktor Yushchenko with 51.99 per cent of the vote to Yanukovych's 44.2 per cent (Central Election Commission of Ukraine, 2004). The re-election of Yushchenko signified a triumph of freedom of choice in Ukraine.

Figure 11. Should the new president continue Kuchma's policies or make a radical change? Data in per cent, September 2004



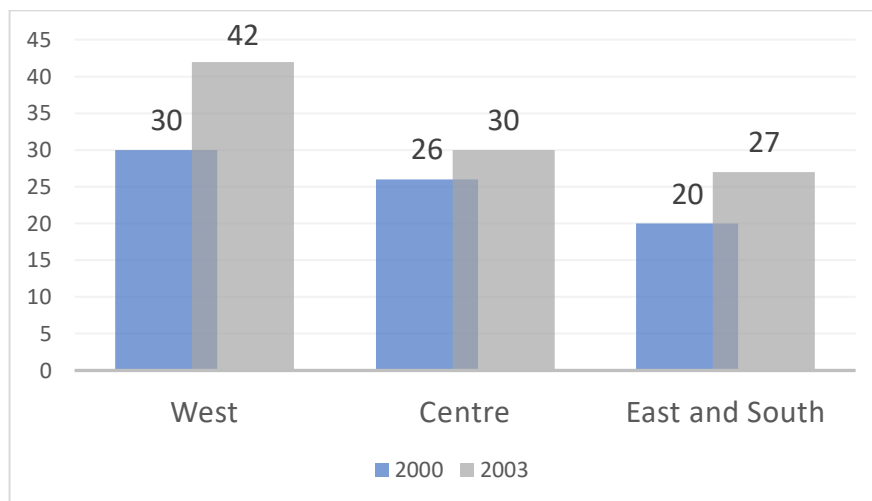
Source: own construction based on Razumkov Centre (2004)

The reasons for the mass dissatisfaction with the election results were not only outrage at the massive fraud and the presence of a Russian trace in the elections but also the loss of hope for change. For many, Yushchenko was associated with change and belief in a better future and prosperity. When Yushchenko did not become president, it caused outrage among the people who had voted for him. In September 2004, just before the elections, the Razumkov Centre conducted a poll to assess whether the new president should continue Kuchma's policies or make a radical change. The results showed that 68.8 per cent of respondents favoured radical change, while only 19.3 per cent favoured maintaining Kuchma's approach. Such data reveals a deep crisis of confidence in the established political system. The announcement of the victory of Viktor Yanukovych, who promised to

continue Kuchma's policies, dashed hopes and culminated in the Orange Revolution.

The 2004 elections were also notable because, for the first time since independence, neither of the two leading contenders for power represented the Communist Party. The 2004 elections thus marked the beginning of a change in Ukraine's political course and society's decision to embark on a democratic path. As Sushko and Lisnychuk (2005) rightfully argue, Yushchenko emerged as a response to society's need for a leader who embodied both traditional and modern values, carrying the transformational energy of society and driving change. He was the first president committed to democracy and the rule of law (Karatnycky, 2005). Hence, the Orange Revolution did not simply divide Ukraine into East and West but created a split between those who supported democracy and those who, for various reasons, distrusted western-style governance. The latter group clung to Soviet-era traditions, supported strong leadership and believed in the guiding role of the party (Samokhvalov, 2005).

Figure 12. Percentage of people who answered “I strongly agree” with the opinion that “democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government” (data in per cent)

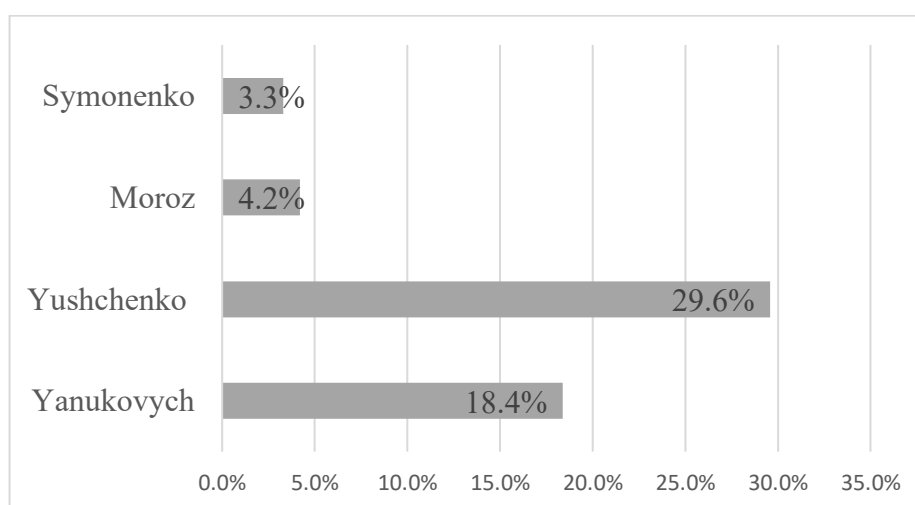


Source: own construction based on Konieczna (2005).

The Figure 12 presents the per centage of respondents who answered 'I strongly agree' with the statement about the superiority of democracy over

other political systems. This shows that residents of western Ukraine are the most supportive of democracy, with support declining as one moves eastwards. However, it is essential to note that a significant majority in all regions generally support democracy (Konieczna, 2005). As mentioned in the previous section, the value gap between western and eastern Ukraine is primarily shaped by the country's historical background. western Ukraine, which was under Austro-Hungarian and Polish rule for centuries, is more aligned with western values, including democracy. In contrast, eastern Ukraine, which was part of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union, is more accustomed to a totalitarian style of governance. Thus, Kuchma and Yanukovych's style of governance was more familiar to the population of eastern Ukraine, which is characterised by more passive civic activity. In contrast, Yushchenko's approach was more attractive to western Ukraine, which is more politically active and more supportive of democratic values.

Figure 13. Which one of the leading presidential candidates can bring Ukraine closer to joining the EU? Data in per cent, July 2004



Source: own construction based on Razumkov Centre (2004)

The Orange Revolution was mainly driven by internal factors, with foreign policy issues playing a minimal role, especially the "pro-European" or "anti-European" stance (Konieczna, 2005). Nevertheless, the issue of Ukraine's European integration was already being raised and was important for society. In July 2004, about 30 per cent of respondents to a Razumkov Centre poll thought that Yushchenko, if elected president, could help Ukraine move closer

to EU membership. Only about 18 per cent believed that Yanukovych could advance Ukraine's integration into the European Union (Figure 13). This indicates that the question of possible EU membership, although not yet a critical societal issue, was already on the agenda before the 2004 elections. And it was Yushchenko who was associated by many with the pro-European orientation of foreign policy.

Thus, one of the main achievements of the Orange Revolution was forming an active and politically aware civil society, in contrast to the passive political climate during the Kuchma presidency. This active participation of civil society, in turn, ensured the victory of democracy in the 2004 presidential elections in Ukraine. Civil society, empowered by the revolution, began to play a significant role in influencing domestic and foreign policy. However, despite this progress, the development of civil society in Ukraine has been slow; a fully formed political nation and civic identity have not yet emerged due to the 2004 revolution (Hillenbrand, 2005). In addition, the division of society between the East and West was still very pronounced.

Political Elites' Preferences

During the Orange Revolution, the central figures were the leaders of two competing political parties – Yushchenko (leader of Our Ukraine block) and Yanukovych (leader of the Party of Regions). Interestingly, Yushchenko was not officially nominated by any political party but positioned himself as the people's candidate, contrasting himself with a pro-government candidate. This image emphasised the division between the nation and the government and drew attention to the fundamental conflict between them. His political support came mainly from two opposition coalitions: Yushchenko's Our Ukraine Bloc and Yulia Tymoshenko's Bloc. The image of Yushchenko and his coalition resonated with the public, as evidenced by record turnout at rallies even before the first round (Sushko & Lisnychuk, 2005). Yushchenko was a pro-reform, pro-western and opposition figure. Although he was portraying himself as a new political elite, technically, this was not the case, as he was a key figure in President Kuchma's administration and served as Prime Minister from 1999-2001 (Eberhardt, 2009). During this tenure, however, he demonstrated his reformist stance. His policies led to 6 per cent

economic growth in Ukraine. They increased Yushchenko's popularity, but at the same time, these reforms, particularly in the energy sector, conflicted with the interests of certain political and business groups and cost him the position of prime minister (Sushko & Lisnychuk, 2005). These events transformed him from prime minister in the Kuchma government to an opposition leader. Moreover, his achievements gave him a strong public base and led to success during the presidential election campaign. Yushchenko's campaign promises were the opposite of the previous president, Leonid Kuchma. They included strengthening relations between Ukraine and the EU while prioritising the fight against widespread corruption and the dominant influence of the country's economic clans (Kurth & Kempe, 2005). He also criticised the shortcomings of Ukrainian democracy, advocating a genuine parliamentary system, denouncing media censorship and supporting open dialogue between society and the government (Hillenbrand, 2005). Therefore, the main feature of Yushchenko's political programme was that he proposed to reform the post-Soviet system and introduce democratic institutions in the country. On foreign policy, Yushchenko advocated closer ties with the EU, starting with achieving the EU's recognition of Ukraine as a market economy state, creating a free trade area with the EU and beginning EU membership negotiations by 2007 (Woehrel, 2005).

On the other hand, Yanukovych represented the continuation of the political course set by Kuchma and was a pro-eastern candidate. Yanukovych was presented as a pragmatic alternative to Yushchenko, a leader who was neither nationalist nor pro-western. He was portrayed as a practical leader focused on achieving concrete, tangible results, backed by a coalition of forces and positioned as the president's successor (Sushko & Lisnychuk, 2005). Russian President Vladimir Putin also unofficially supported him (Kempe & Solonenko, 2005). Besides that, Yanukovych had the support of the influential Donetsk clan, making him less of a threat to the existing regime (Hillenbrand, 2005). In particular, Yanukovych's political rise was significantly supported by the oligarch Akhmetov, who, before the 2004 elections, became the wealthiest man in Ukraine and the most influential oligarch, effectively controlling the Donbas. Moreover, Yanukovych's past was already tainted by two prison terms in his youth and the dubious

accumulation of wealth in the Donetsk region during his tenure as governor. Yanukovych's nomination as Kuchma's successor reflects key characteristics of the Ukrainian political system in the early 2000s, including personal loyalty to the leader, a willingness to manipulate election results, and a controversial past that made him vulnerable and dependent on the system (Sushko & Lisnychuk, 2005). Instead, Yushchenko was portraying himself as a new elite with an unblemished reputation, a reformer and an opponent of the then government. This appealed to many Ukrainians who had lost confidence in the Kuchma government, as described in the previous section.

During the electoral campaign, Yanukovych's team employed illicit and radical tactics, which were financed by Russian sources and facilitated by a team of Russian political technologists. This included poisoning Yushchenko (Wilson, 2014). On 6 September, Yushchenko fell seriously ill, missing almost a month of campaigning, leaving him physically weak and his face badly scarred. Tests later confirmed that he had been poisoned by dioxin (Karatnycky, 2005). In addition, a large-scale media campaign played a crucial role in Yanukovych's success in the second round: national TV channels and most private media actively promoted his candidacy. At the same time, the opposition faced severe media restrictions. Yushchenko's campaign had significantly fewer resources and limited media coverage. As a result, Yushchenko engaged his supporters directly through rallies, which became the main form of uncensored communication with the public (Sushko & Lisnychuk, 2005). From July to September 2004, Yushchenko and his team held up to five or six meetings daily, gathering tens of thousands of people in cities across Ukraine. These meetings helped create vital networks of civic and party activists who were key in organising the mass protests (Karatnycky, 2005).

In the 2004 elections and during the Orange Revolution, two rival political leaders exploited the East-West divide in Ukrainian society to gain popular support. Political elites tried to shift the focus from effective governance and corruption issues, polarising Ukraine's eastern and western regions (Wilson, 2014). Yushchenko's bloc, Our Ukraine, represented the interests of western Ukraine, advocating deeper integration with the EU and strengthening the

status of the Ukrainian language. In contrast, his opponent, Viktor Yanukovych, and his Party of Regions represented the interests of eastern Ukraine, pushing for closer ties with Russia and promoting the official status of the Russian language. Viktor Yanukovych advocated the official status of the Russian language, which automatically lost him votes in western Ukraine but helped him retain strong support in the east and south. On the other hand, Viktor Yushchenko emphasised strengthening the position of the Ukrainian language while also advocating a special status for the Russian language in Ukraine (Shevchuk & Trach, 2009). Hence, during the pre-election period, the country was divided along linguistic lines, with the East and West following their respective language preferences.

Furthermore, the country was divided regarding which foreign policy approach to pursue. Viktor Yushchenko's political agenda emphasised the long-term economic benefits of closer ties with the EU alongside the geopolitical goal of securing Ukraine's sovereignty from Russian influence. In contrast, the pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovych focused on short-term economic gains and security interests, viewing potential European integration as a threat to Ukraine's security in the context of its relationship with Russia. Yanukovych continued to promote the policies of the ruling circle, which echoed Soviet-era rhetoric, portraying the West as the enemy and Russia as a "brotherly people". He publicly rejected NATO integration and prioritised rapprochement with Russia and other CIS countries (Sushko & Lisnychuk, 2005). Such preferences are consistent with LI theory, which suggests they can vary within the same state. However, this political division highlights the importance of examining the societal level in the case of Ukraine because the revolution and massive participation of the Ukrainian people played a key role in shaping national preferences. It demonstrated that society chose a pro-western candidate and a pro-European direction for Ukraine's development. Ukrainian society has prioritised the long-term economic benefits of European integration and the country's sovereignty from Russian domination. As explained in the previous chapter, utilitarian considerations and the desire for economic prosperity were central to Ukrainians' support for independence in 1991. Similarly, these motivations were key in their preference for a pro-western candidate during the 2004

revolution. The thesis argues that rival political parties used identity politics to come to power and mobilise society, and pro-western and pro-eastern programs were used to gain public support rather than to change the country's foreign policy, as seen in Yushchenko's policies after coming to power.

The regional divide was further exploited by rival political leaders when the election results were announced, and thousands of protesters filled the streets and squares of Kyiv. The pro-Yanukovych political elite accused the democratic opposition led by Yushchenko of organising a conspiracy directed by foreign forces. They framed the events in Kyiv as a conflict between the "hard-working" Russian-speaking east and the nationalist, even fascist, west of Ukraine. Yushchenko's supporters who protested against the election fraud were portrayed as drug addicts and vodka-fueled mobs manipulated by foreign conspirators. Meanwhile, supporters of Yanukovych rallied in southern and eastern Ukraine, accusing the opposition of trying to deprive the hard-working residents of Donetsk and Luhansk, who, through their steel plants and coal mines, provide a third of the country's GDP, of their legitimate victory (Samokhvalov, 2005). This explains why, even in the repetition of the second round in December 2004, Yushchenko received a majority of votes from western and central Ukraine, while Yanukovych secured a majority of votes from eastern and southern Ukraine (see Figure 6). This construction of regional rivalry by competing political leaders significantly undermined the process of Ukrainian civic nation-building in the early 2000s.

National Preferences

To sum up, the Orange Revolution became a key moment in Ukraine's European aspirations. It led to the formation of preferences for European integration both at the level of society and political elites, thus shaping national preferences. The issue of adopting a European integration course in foreign policy was raised by Yushchenko's political party during the presidential elections and caused great resonance in society. In 2005, a president with a pro-western agenda came to power for the first time in independent Ukraine. This followed the 2004 revolution when people took to the streets to express their outrage at widespread electoral fraud and to oppose Russian funding of the Ukrainian elections. The revolution aimed to free

Ukraine from Russian influence and bring it closer to EU norms. The Orange Revolution first shaped the preferences of the vast majority of Ukrainians for a European future. This was primarily due to Ukrainians' utilitarian desire to improve their quality of life and move away from post-Soviet bureaucracy and corruption. This desire was particularly pronounced in 2004, in the context of the EU's major Eastern Enlargement that year. The revolution accelerated the development of EU-Ukraine relations and became the starting point for negotiations on EU integration. After the Orange Revolution, one of the EU's concessions to Ukraine was opening negotiations for an Association Agreement in 2007 (Wolczuk, 2014). The revolution put European integration on the agenda for the first time and set it as a potential national goal. While there were still disagreements in society about what kind of foreign policy the state should pursue, the revolution, for the first time, revealed the demand of a significant part of the population for Ukraine's European integration.

Events in Ukraine in the wake of the Orange Revolution are consistent with the assumptions of Liberal Intergovernmentalism, which argues that national preferences and interests are shaped by internal interest groups and electoral blocs, influenced by broader social, economic and cultural interdependencies. However, to a large extent, the events in Ukraine in 2004 are characterised by political parties' use of identity politics to win elections and gain the population's support. This, in turn, significantly impacted the formation of national preferences. The thesis argues that while Liberal Intergovernmentalism offers a plausible explanation for national preferences in Ukraine, it does not fully account for the impact of identity politics on the outbreak of the Orange Revolution and the subsequent formation of preferences of the state.

3.1.2. Interstate Bargaining

Post-Orange Revolution: Political and Economic Challenges

To understand Ukraine's negotiating position in relations with the EU and Russia after the Orange Revolution, it is essential first to understand the political and economic realities that the country faced after the revolution. First, in return for re-election in 2004, Yushchenko compromised too much

with pro-Yanukovych elites. A key issue was his agreement to amend the constitution to reduce the new president's powers after the next parliamentary elections in the spring of 2006, which would limit his powers after just one year in office (Wilson, 2014). The 2004 constitutional reform aimed to restrict the president's powers in favour of the parliament, transforming Ukraine from a strong presidential system to a mixed parliamentary and presidential system. Although the reform was intended to democratise the system and create a system of checks and balances, it was more of a tactical move to resolve political disputes between the main political forces. Therefore, Yushchenko agreed to a constitutional reform and other concessions to secure his political interests while undermining the possibility of fulfilling reforms promised during the Orange Revolution. The problem, however, was that despite such a significant reduction in the president's powers, society still perceived him as the main leader and expected him to fulfil the promises he had made during the revolution (Eberhardt, 2009).

Second, the leaders of the Orange Revolution failed to fulfil their promise to separate politics from oligarchic influence. Although they succeeded in returning shares in Kryvorizhstal, Ukraine's largest steelworks, from Pinchuk and Akhmetov, the broader attempt to dismantle the oligarchic system failed, political conflicts emerged, and the oligarchs continued to have significant influence over Ukrainian politics (Eberhardt, 2009). Yushchenko also granted amnesty to Kuchma and those responsible for election fraud, contrary to his promises at the height of the Orange Revolution. Even the poisoning of Yushchenko was not adequately investigated (Wilson, 2014).

Another failed promise of the leaders of Ukraine's Orange Revolution was implementing economic reforms to free entrepreneurship from red tape, corruption and administrative barriers. In 2005, some measures were taken to improve the business environment, including simplifying procedures for starting small and medium-sized enterprises and revising the regulatory framework. This led to the abolition of many outdated legal provisions. However, reform efforts subsequently weakened, and small businesses faced increasing obstacles due to the persistence of the bureaucratic system. Instead of simplifying taxes and reducing corruption, the government focused on

strengthening the powers of the tax and customs administrations, which led to higher taxes and an increased tax burden on employers. This exacerbated the situation and contributed to the growth of the black economy, with the effective (real) tax rate in Ukraine rising to 57 per cent by 2009 (Eberhardt, 2009).

Between 2001 and 2010, Ukraine's GDP grew steadily (table 5), except in 2009 when the financial crisis hit the world. 2009 was also the year when the biggest gas war between Ukraine and Russia led to a colossal increase in gas prices for Ukraine (more on this in the next section). In 2002, partly due to the policies of Yushchenko when he was prime minister, Ukraine's GDP grew by 5.3 per cent of the previous year at the 2021 constant prices. The following year, it grew by 9.5 per cent, and in 2004, by 11.8 per cent of the previous year, at the 2021 constant prices. From 2001 to 2005, Ukraine's GDP almost doubled, and from 2001 to 2010 it increased fivefold, excluding inflation.

Table 5. GDP of Ukraine during 2001-2010, in millions of UAH and per cent of the previous year, at the 2021 constant prices

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
GDP	211 175	234 138	277 355	357 544	457 325
per cent of the previous year, at the 2021 constant prices		105,3	109,5	111,8	103,1
Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
GDP	565 018	751 106	990 819	947 042	1 120 585
per cent of the previous year, at the 2021 constant prices	107,6	108,2	102,2	84,9	104,1

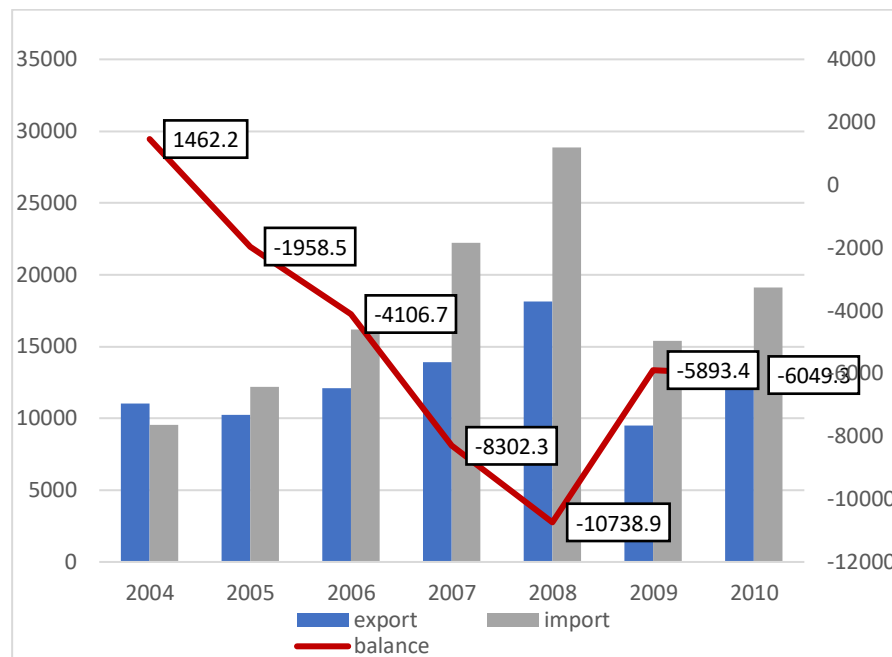
Source: own edition based on State Statistics Service of Ukraine (1991-2025)

Concerning foreign policy, as soon as Yushchenko comes to power, the interstate negotiations conceived by LI come into play. To begin with, Yushchenko's foreign policy was not exclusively western-oriented as many expected. Once in power, he had to pursue a balanced foreign policy and consider security preferences, particularly regarding Russia. This was partly due to Ukraine's economic dependence on Russia, especially for Russian gas

(Wilson, 2014). Moreover, in 2004, Russia was Ukraine's key trade partner, accounting for 17.8 per cent of Ukraine's exports and 40.1 per cent of its imports. The second was Germany, accounting for 5.7 per cent of exports and 9.4 per cent of imports. Turkey was the third partner for Ukrainian exports, and Turkmenistan was the third partner for imports (World Integrated Trade Solution, 2024).

The EU was not a major trading partner for Ukraine at that time. Figure 15, however, shows a significant increase in foreign trade in goods between Ukraine and the EU following the Orange Revolution, with a gradual increase in the share of Ukrainian exports and imports in EU trade since then. The exception is 2009-2010, when both imports and exports to the EU fell significantly due to the world economic crisis of 2008. In 2004, Ukraine had a positive trade balance with the EU. However, from 2005 to 2010, the country had a consistently negative trade balance in goods with the EU, with the highest level in 2008. Nevertheless, Ukraine's main trading partners were the post-Soviet countries, particularly Russia. As a result, Ukraine's priority at the time was to preserve its relationship with Russia, especially given that trade and economic ties with the EU were still in the early stages of development. Therefore, Viktor Yushchenko's foreign policy was founded on bargaining and balancing between the EU and Russia. Yushchenko sought closer ties with the European Union, NATO, and the United States, aiming for eventual membership in NATO and the EU. At the same time, he viewed Russia as Ukraine's "strategic partner." For example, during his first trip abroad as president, Yushchenko met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on 24 January 2005 (Yurchenko, 2005). Hence, once elected, President Yushchenko sought closer ties with the EU and NATO for Ukraine's long-term economic and security interests while maintaining strategic relations with Russia to secure immediate geopolitical and economic interests.

Figure 15. Ukraine's foreign trade in goods with EU countries in 2004 – 2010, millions of US dollars



Source: own construction based on State Statistics Service of Ukraine (1991-2025)

The following section examines Ukraine's policy of balancing between the EU and Russia and its bargaining power concerning both.

Bargaining Power: Ukraine and Russia

The Orange Revolution not only failed to bring Ukraine the anticipated economic results or further European integration but also worsened relations between Russia and Ukraine. Russia viewed the protests in Ukraine as an anti-Russian action (Golani, 2011, p. 44). Russia's foreign policy generally reflects a geopolitical realist view of the world. From this perspective, great powers are entitled to spheres of influence that other states must recognise and respect. Russia perceived that the West had violated Russia's security interests in a region that it considers its historic sphere of influence (Raik et al., 2024). In light of the unique geopolitical position of Ukraine, the strategic value of Crimea and the Black Sea fleet for Russia, as well as the substantial Russian-speaking population in Ukraine, the country plays a vital role in Russia's geopolitical interests for Russia. Consequently, after the revolution, there were several tensions between the two countries, including disputes over the

Black Sea Fleet and Russia's security concerns regarding Ukraine's relationships with NATO and the EU.

In August 2008, Russia used vessels from the Black Sea Fleet to blockade the coast of Georgia, refocusing attention on the fleet's position. Ukraine vowed to refuse to allow the fleet to return to Sevastopol; however, Russian commanders claimed that Ukraine had no legal jurisdiction to block the ships' return. The event demonstrated that Ukraine has little control over the fleet's activities (Larrabee, 2010). During the presidency of Victor Yushchenko, the Ukrainian government declared that the lease of the Black Sea fleet would not be extended and that the fleet would have to leave Sevastopol by 2017 (Smith & Harari, 2014). This posed a significant threat to Russia's security because the Ukrainian seaport is a crucial hub for Russian trade.

Another Russia's security concern was Ukraine's desire to potentially join NATO. Although Ukraine has openly stated its desire to join the EU and then NATO since 1994, it was in 2005 when the Kremlin started to perceive Ukraine's possible participation in NATO as a serious threat. This was due to the launch of an intensified dialogue on Ukraine's membership in NATO in 2005 (Golani, 2011). In his 2007 Munich speech, Putin emphasised that Russia perceives eastward expansion as a threat (*Munich Speech of Vladimir Putin*, 2007). Nevertheless, in 2008, NATO declared that it welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO and that these countries will become members of NATO (NATO, 2008). Consequently, Russia perceived that admitting those two countries to NATO would represent a "direct threat" to Russia (Mearsheimer, 2014). The year 2008 marked a significant shift in Ukraine's relations with the EU, as the country became a member of the World Trade Organisation. At the same time, efforts were launched to lay the foundations for a DCFTA with the EU (Matyushenko et al., 2015). From the perspective of Russian leaders, the expansion of the European Union serves as a convenient rationale for the enlargement of NATO, which represents a threat to Russian security interests (Mearsheimer, 2014). Ukraine's decision to sign the Association Agreement and move closer to the EU marked a pivotal moment in its history and

relations with Russia and the EU. The following sections will provide a comprehensive examination of this development.

Russia's foreign policy is also consistent with the postulates of Liberal Intergovernmentalism, according to which states conduct rational regional integration policies, pursuing primarily economic interests. Russia posits substantial economic interests in Ukraine. In particular, in the early 2000s, Ukraine was the primary transit route for Russian gas exports to Europe, which was Russia's main source of revenue, handling about 80 per cent of the total transit volume (Pirani, 2009). When Russia supported Viktor Yanukovych in the 2004 presidential elections, part of the deal included offers of lucrative gas contracts at reasonable prices (USD50/thousand m³). However, once it became clear that Yanukovych had lost, Russia became less accommodating towards Ukraine. It demanded a contract renegotiation, which guaranteed Ukraine a gas price of USD50 tcm until 2009 (Larsson, 2006). To clarify, in the summer of 2004, Russia and Ukraine reached an agreement which provided for a loan from Gazprom to Ukraine's Naftogaz to repay debts and secure stable gas supplies for five years (until 2009) in exchange for Ukraine's role in gas transit to Europe. This barter agreement had a notional price of USUSD50 tcm of Russian gas and a transit tariff of USUSD1.09375 tcm per 100 km, with no actual money exchange between the parties (Stern, 2006). In April 2005, Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko proposed to President Putin a shift from barter to market-based energy relations, prompting Putin to instruct Gazprom to renegotiate "outdated" contracts. Tensions increased when Russia raised energy prices significantly to "market" levels, causing Ukraine's costs to soar from USD50 to USD160-USD230 per 1,000 cubic metres, despite an existing gas agreement. The situation peaked in January 2006 when Russia cut off gas supplies to Ukraine over the unresolved price dispute (Golani, 2011, p. 48). This disruption affected not only Ukraine but also many European countries, including Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Austria and Croatia. In early January 2006, Russia accused Ukraine of stealing 104.8 million cubic metres (mcm) of gas between 1 and 2 January and a further 118.7 mcm between 2 and 3 January. Ukraine admitted that some gas had been taken but claimed it had only used 15 per cent of the gas as part of its transit fee. Eventually, a

complex agreement was reached under which Ukraine would buy 34 billion cubic metres (bcm) of Russian and Central Asian gas for the first half of 2006 at USD95 per thousand cubic metres (tcm). Ukraine also secured 22 bcm of gas from Turkmenistan at USD 50 - USD 60 per tcm. Transit fees were set at USD 1.6 per tcm per 100 km, to be paid in cash, and the transit fee agreement was to run until 2011 (Larsson, 2006). The 2006 gas conflict ended the practice of barter agreements (importing gas for transit services) that had characterised the Russian-Ukrainian gas trade since 1991, paving the way for greater transparency and the use of market mechanisms (Pirani et al., 2009). However, this agreement only temporarily resolved the issue of gas supplies.

The most serious gas dispute between Russia and Ukraine erupted in January 2009. The parties could not agree on gas supply prices and transit tariffs before the previous agreements expired on 31 December 2008. As a result, Russian gas exports to Ukraine were suspended on 1 January 2009, and exports to 16 EU countries and Moldova were sharply reduced on 6 January and stopped entirely on 7 January. Supplies to Ukraine and the EU resumed on 20 January following the signing of two new ten-year contracts. The dispute caused a humanitarian crisis in the Balkans, where many people could not heat their homes, and significant economic problems in Hungary and Slovakia. Consequently, Ukraine's reputation as a transit country for the EU has been seriously damaged (Pirani et al., 2009). As a result of the negotiations, Ukraine signed a long-term gas supply contract with Gazprom, eliminating intermediaries and establishing a price and tariff formula for transit that was unprofitable for Ukraine. Ukraine did not allow Russia to create a joint Ukrainian-Russian consortium to control the transit pipelines. At the same time, the Ukrainian authorities agreed to allow Gazprom to increase its share of the domestic gas market in Ukraine, giving Russia more significant economic and political influence (Eberhardt, 2009). Therefore, despite the promises of the political elites of the Orange Revolution, they failed to create stable and favourable conditions for gas cooperation with Russia. They could not reduce Ukraine's dependence on Russia and overcome corruption in the gas sector. On the contrary, gas relations between the countries have only worsened, and Ukraine's reliability as a transit state for

the EU countries has been questioned. The imposition of high gas prices on Ukraine has also significantly impacted the country's economy.

In the 2000s, Russia sought to create a Eurasian equivalent of the EU, not primarily for economic integration, but to gain recognition from the West, particularly the EU, as an equal power. This initiative was also a response to the significant increase in EU activism in the post-Soviet space since the 1990s. The EU's involvement in the post-Soviet countries became more pronounced through the European Neighbourhood Policy and the eastern Partnership. While the EU framed its involvement as value-driven, Russian elites saw it as an encroachment on Russia's sphere of influence. The establishment of the Eurasian Development Bank in 2006 was the first significant example of a functioning development finance institution with substantial resources provided by member states rather than a symbolic imitation of the EU (Furman & Libman, 2019). At the same time, institution-building in the post-Soviet space has faced significant challenges, primarily due to Ukraine's role. Yushchenko stated he would prioritise Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration over its participation in the Russian-led Single Economic Space (SES) and the Commonwealth of Independent States. In particular, Ukrainian leaders indicated that they might be open to exploring the possibility of a free trade area within the SES. Still, they were not inclined to pursue a customs or monetary union (Woehrel, 2005).

In general, the relationships between Russia and Ukraine before and after the Orange Revolution can be understood through the lens of Liberal Intergovernmentalism, which posits that larger states, with greater access to information about the preferences of other participants and the functioning of their institutions, can manipulate the results in their favour (Moravcsik, 1998). It is, therefore, not surprising that during the elections, Russia—the most powerful state in the region—influenced the election results and provided financial support to the pro-Russian candidate, intending to maintain Ukraine within its sphere of influence and protect its national interests. Following the Orange Revolution, Russia pursued both security and economic interests, leading to several tensions between the two countries, including gas wars, disputes over the Black Sea Fleet, and Russia's security

concerns regarding Ukraine's relationships with NATO and the EU. On the other hand, Ukraine pursued a balanced foreign policy, maintaining close relations with Russia and, at the same time, deepening its economic ties with the EU, thus pursuing economic and security interests.

Ukraine and the EU: Preferences and Bargaining Power

Since its independence, Ukraine has been a strategically important country for the EU, not only as the largest European state to emerge from the collapse of the Soviet Union but also because of its central geopolitical position in the region. Given its size and importance, Ukraine has long warranted a clear and consistent policy from the European Union. In the 1990s, however, the EU focused mainly on fostering relations with the countries that joined the Union in 2004, alongside its complex relationship with Russia (Raik et al., 2024).

In the 1990s and the early 2000s, Ukraine has often been portrayed in European discourse as a "grey zone" or a subordinate state within Russia's sphere of influence. The enduring Soviet legacy shared historical experiences, and post-Soviet challenges - such as fragile institutions, widespread corruption, and informal political practices - tended to overshadow the development of civil society and the strengthening of Ukrainian national identity (Haran & Burkovskyi, 2022). From the EU's perspective, Ukraine's emphasis on its geopolitical importance, particularly its perceived importance to the West, was misplaced. While growing US interest in Ukraine in the late 1990s may have reinforced this belief, Ukrainian elites failed to understand that the EU's priorities were democratic development and economic efficiency, not just geopolitical considerations. This oversight led to Ukraine neglecting important commitments under the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) and the EU's cautious and distant approach. Ultimately, this experience demonstrated that geopolitical factors alone are insufficient to integrate Ukraine into the EU (Wolczuk, 2003). Ukraine would need to embark on a path of structural economic reforms to pursue European integration.

Hence, before the EU's significant enlargement in 2004, there was no unified policy towards Ukraine. With EU enlargement, however, Ukraine and the EU became direct neighbours, creating a clear need for a stronger and more coherent relationship. In light of these developments, the European Union and Ukraine have agreed to implement the European Neighbourhood Policy to strengthen political, security, economic, and cultural relations between the two parties. This included cross-border cooperation and shared responsibility in conflict prevention and resolution (*EU-Ukraine Action Plan*, 2005). The ENP was designed to address the consequences of exclusion for countries such as Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova, ensuring that they were not affected by the change in the EU's borders (European Commission, 2004). However, the ENP was too broad in scope, encompassing both eastern Europe and Mediterranean countries, and provided only limited support to Ukraine, whose prospects appeared transformed by the Orange Revolution (Wilson, 2014).

The breakthrough in Ukraine-EU relations happened in the aftermath of the Orange Revolution. Although foreign policy was not a major issue in the political debate of 2004 and was not a direct impetus for the Orange Revolution, the link between protests against electoral fraud and a growing desire for European integration was evident during the conflict as a result of the different ways in which the EU and Russia were involved in the conflict. After Yushchenko's victory, integration with the EU and NATO became a key priority. One of Ukraine's achievements in international negotiations following the Orange Revolution was the conclusion of Ukraine's 15-year negotiations to join the World Trade Organisation in 2008. It is worth noting, however, that the negotiations would most likely have been successful even without the Orange Revolution. The successful implementation of the decisions on Ukraine's accession to the WTO and its alignment with European standards was supported not only by the Orange forces but also by Viktor Yanukovich's Party of Regions. A key factor in this process was the convergence of the state's interests and the oligarchs, who played a decisive role in implementing these decisions (Eberhardt, 2009).

However, Ukraine's European policy focused more on image-building than the economic transformation and integration measures necessary for EU accession. For example, the new government created the Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration post to demonstrate its commitment to EU rapprochement. But the necessary reforms to synchronise with EU standards were not carried out. The gas wars between Russia and Ukraine in 2006 and 2009 also brought the EU into a conflict between the two countries for the first time. While the conflict undermined Ukraine's reputation as a transit country for the EU, it also highlighted the importance of the EU developing economic relations with Ukraine. The gas wars made European countries aware of the dire state of Ukraine's gas sector and forced them to offer financial assistance on the condition that Ukraine finally implement long-delayed reforms (Eberhardt, 2009).

Consequently, in 2009, the EU launched the eastern Partnership programme, replacing the previous Neighbourhood Policy and offering Ukraine the chance to sign an Association Agreement and establish a Free Trade Area with the EU. While this framework offered Ukraine closer political ties and deeper trade relations, it did not provide a clear path to EU membership. One of the reasons for the EU's cautious approach towards Ukraine was the geopolitical factor, particularly the desire to avoid straining relations with Russia. At the same time, since 2004, the EU has maintained a strong consensus on the importance of supporting Ukraine's political and economic reforms (Raik et al., 2024). However, the Ukrainian political elite of the Yushchenko era was sceptical about the eastern Partnership and have been reluctant to work on an Association Agreement and create DCFTA with the EU. Over time, the European aspirations of the Ukrainian political elite diminished, and some parts of society shared this disappointment. Since the political elite of the time saw European integration not as a means of modernisation but as a political tool to gain power, no significant progress was made in EU-Ukraine relations (Eberhardt, 2009).

In summary, Ukraine firmly opted for closer integration with the West after the Orange Revolution, particularly the European Union. By 2004, Ukraine's national preferences for European integration had emerged. This

marked a change in Ukraine's foreign policy, and the country became an active participant in the European Neighbourhood Policy and, later, the eastern Partnership programme. The Yushchenko government adopted a "balanced" foreign policy, pursuing Ukraine's eventual membership in both the EU and NATO, thus positioning the country on a European trajectory while at the same time maintaining close relations with Russia due to the countries' historical and geographical ties. However, progress in institutionalising relations with the EU has been limited. After the significant enlargement of the EU, the organisation's primary focus shifted to integrating the 10 new member states, with less emphasis on external relations. As a result, further enlargement was not a priority, and the EU made no statements about Ukraine's possible accession in the near future. At the same time, the European choice of Ukraine contradicted Russia's national geopolitical and economic interests, leading to a deterioration of relations with Russia, in particular to gas wars and disputes over the Black Sea Fleet. This, in turn, also slowed down the development of relations between Ukraine and the EU and weakened Ukraine's bargaining position. Consequently, despite Ukraine's strong desire for closer ties with the EU, no significant steps were taken at the time to advance its integration. As a result, the final level of analysis - the institutional level, where the collective outcomes of the negotiation process between the actors involved are considered - has been excluded from the study of Ukraine's EU integration after the Orange Revolution. Although the negotiations on the Association Agreement started in 2007 and were mainly shaped by Ukraine's national preferences after the Orange Revolution, no concrete agreement was reached during this period.

3.2. Euromaidan

The Euromaidan Revolution, also known as the Revolution of Dignity, took place in Ukraine from November 2013 to February 2014. It began as protests against President Viktor Yanukovich's decision to abandon an association agreement with the EU in favour of closer ties with Russia. Initially led by students, the protests became a mass movement demanding democratic reforms, the president's resignation, and European integration.

The government responded with brutal repression, including the use of riot police, rubber bullets and sniper fire, resulting in hundreds of deaths in February 2014. On February 22, 2014, Yanukovych fled to Russia, and by June, a new pro-western, anti-Russian government was elected in Kyiv. Russia perceived this situation in Ukraine as a threat, concerned about the potential expansion of NATO close to its borders and the prospect of losing control of the Black Sea Fleet. Following the victory of the Revolution of Dignity and the overthrow of President Viktor Yanukovych, the parliament in Ukraine temporarily assumed power under the leadership of the speaker of the Verkhovna Rada. During this time, the country was in political instability, which Russia took advantage of. This culminated in Russia's annexation of Crimea and its support for extremist separatist groups in the Donbass, sparking the conflict in eastern Ukraine. (Mearsheimer, 2014). Hence, while the revolution led to Ukraine's shift towards the West, it also triggered Russia's annexation of Crimea and a conflict in eastern Ukraine with lasting consequences for the region.

3.2.1. National Preferences Formation

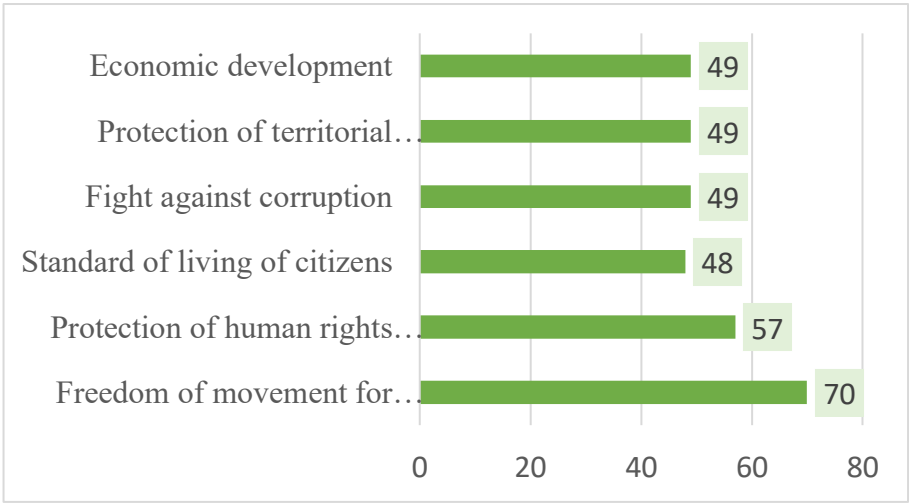
Society preferences

In 2013, Ukraine had to make an important choice: signing an Association Agreement with the EU or joining Russia in the Customs Union. In November 2013, President Yanukovych rejected the EU agreement and opted for closer ties with Russia. This decision led to widespread anti-government protests. Despite the pro-Russian stance of the political leadership, the demonstrations revealed the Ukrainian people's resilience and determination to shape the country's domestic and international direction. In 2004, Ukrainians gathered on the Maidan to assert their right to choose the president. This time, Ukrainians protested not only for their democratic choice but also for the European future.

In November 2013, the lack of a unified Ukrainian national identity led to heightened tensions between supporters of western integration and supporters of integration with Russia. Moreover, the language spoken by the

Ukrainian people became a highly contentious matter, leading to divisions within society and between regions. According to Zolkina (2014), EU integration was mainly supported in the western region (87.7 per cent) and Central Ukraine (64 per cent). In the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine, public opinion was largely divided between supporting EU integration, joining the Customs Union or remaining outside both. The Donbass stood out as the only region where a majority (67.8 per cent) favoured joining the Customs Union (Zolkina, 2014). Liberal Intergovernmentalism is insufficient to account for the regional divide shaped by cultural cleavages over European integration.

Figure 16. How beneficial will the signing of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union be for Ukraine in these specific areas?



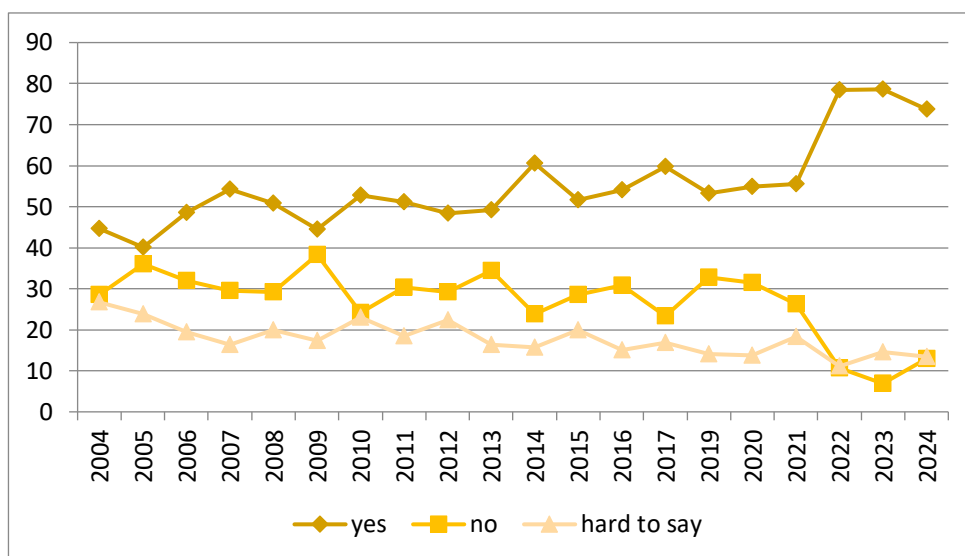
Source: own construction based on International Republican Institute (2013)

The issue of signing the Association Agreement in 2013 has sparked a heated debate in Ukrainian society, shaping discussions about the geopolitical direction of the country and its relations with the European Union and Russia. In September 2013, the International Republican Institute surveyed Ukrainians' perceptions of the potential benefits of signing the Association Agreement. According to the survey, 48 per cent of Ukrainians believed that signing the agreement with the European Union in November 2013 would positively impact the country (International Republican Institute, 2013). The

survey also found that 70 per cent of respondents considered freedom of movement a key benefit. In addition, 57 per cent believed that the agreement would positively impact the protection of human rights and freedoms. Almost half (48 per cent) thought it would improve living standards, while 49 per cent thought it would promote economic development, help fight corruption and strengthen the protection of Ukraine's territorial integrity (Figure 16).

It can be argued that freedom of movement has been one of the most tangible benefits for the wider Ukrainian population. Starting from June 11, 2017, Ukrainian citizens holding biometric passports were granted visa-free access (EEAS Press Team, 2020). This was a significant improvement for ordinary citizens, greatly simplifying travel to the EU and making tourism more accessible and convenient.

Figure 17: Public Opinion on whether Ukraine Should Join the EU



Source: own construction based on Razumkov Centre, (2018, 2024)

As shown in Figure 17, the highest level of support for EU integration was in 2014, when it reached 60.6 per cent. Notably, in the years leading up to the Euromaidan, support remained below 50 per cent, reaching 48.4 per cent in 2012 and 49.2 per cent in 2013. After the revolution in 2013-2014, there was a slight decline in this trend. However, it is significant that since the Euromaidan, the approval for EU integration has consistently remained above 50 per cent and has never fallen below this threshold. Hence, since

2014, there has been a growing trend of support for deeper European integration within society.

In conclusion, since 2013, support for European integration among Ukrainians has become clear and largely unified, with support coming from both the east and west of the country. Moreover, Russia's aggression has significantly changed perceptions of Russia, even among Russian-speaking Ukrainians, and contributed to the development of a new Ukrainian identity (Panter, 2023). Prior to 2013, views on European integration divided Ukraine along regional lines, largely due to historical factors. Now, however, it is the pursuit of European integration that has brought the country together, uniting its people in their quest for reform, a better quality of life and a peaceful, prosperous future free from dependence on Russia (Kychak, 2020). In many ways, the Euromaidan revolution marked the beginning of a unified Ukrainian identity.

Political Elites Preferences

Ironically, Yanukovych was a central figure in both the Orange Revolution, when people protested against his alleged fraud and Russian interference in the elections, and the Revolution of Dignity, when Yanukovych refused to sign the Association Agreement with the EU. The fact that Yanukovych came to power in 2010 after the Orange Revolution is a noteworthy precedent. After the Orange Revolution, Yanukovych not only remained on the political scene but also managed to present himself as the sole defender of the eastern and southern regions of the country. This rhetoric largely secured Yanukovych's presidency in 2010 (Samokhvalov, 2005).

Another factor was the growing political rivalry between Yushchenko and Tymoshenko, the two central figures of the Orange Revolution. As the 2010 presidential elections approached, their personal tensions escalated. With Yushchenko's popularity plummeting and polls suggesting he had little chance of making it to the second round, his main objective became blocking Tymoshenko's path to the presidency. In the end, Yanukovych won the 2010 election by a narrow margin of 3.48 per cent over Tymoshenko (Larrabee, 2010). Thus, the power struggle between the two leading figures of the

Orange Revolution, who many Ukrainians associated with hope for change, led to the possibility of Yanukovych, who had been the cause of the revolution in the first place, coming to power in 2010.

Once in power, Yanukovych conducted a somewhat questionable interior politics (established complete control over the judiciary, granted the president extensive powers to appoint and dismiss ministers and effectively controlled all branches of government; imprisoned his political opponents; Kivalov-Kolesnichenko language law, that enhanced the presence of the Russian language across Ukraine) as detailed in the previous chapter. Hence, Yanukovych's presidency undermined the Orange Revolution's greatest achievement, slowing the system's inevitable shift towards autocracy (Eberhardt, 2009).

Ukraine's slide towards authoritarianism and the political elite's rapprochement with Russia became particularly evident when Yanukovych did not sign the Association Agreement. In 2013, when Ukraine had to choose between an Association Agreement with the EU and joining the Russian-led Customs Union, the decision to join the CU seemed more advantageous for the Yanukovych government. The DCFTA, part of the Association Agreement with the EU, focused too much on trade, with the benefits of increased trade seen as long-term. In addition, the EU asked Ukraine to make significant changes while offering little in return. On the other hand, Russia was willing to support the regime without requiring any changes. The immediate economic impact of the implementation of DCFTA in economically struggling countries has also been overlooked, as has the potential reaction from Russia. Eventually, on November 21, 2013, just a week before the Vilnius Summit, Ukraine withdrew from the deal (Wilson, 2014, p. 65).

Yanukovych's government was pursuing both immediate economic and geopolitical interests to avoid potential conflict with Russia. However, this decision was vehemently opposed by the majority of Ukrainians, leading to the Euromaidan protests, the impeachment of Yanukovych, and the subsequent election of a new government. Once again, it is evident how

public opinion and identity politics shape the formation of national preferences and influence Ukraine's foreign policy.

National Preferences

Euromaidan became a defining moment in forming national preferences regarding Ukraine's regional integration. First, after Euromaidan, relations between Ukraine and Russia began to deteriorate due to Russia's attack on Ukraine in the east and the annexation of Crimea. After that, the Eurasian vector of Ukraine's foreign policy was not on the agenda. Subsequent Ukrainian presidents (Poroshenko and Zelenskyi) and governments were consolidated about Ukraine's European choice. Second, the Russian assault in response to the revolution completely altered the attitude of Russian-speaking Ukrainians toward Russia, resulting in the development of a new Ukrainian paradigm of identity and the eradication of the persisting East-West divide. Since 2014, Ukrainians have become more united than ever in their views on the direction of the country's foreign policy and economic development.

The pro-European vector of Ukraine's foreign policy was primarily determined by the society. Although Russia did not interfere in the elections this time and Yanukovich came to power legally, Russia nevertheless played a significant role in manipulating the Yanukovich government not to sign the Association Agreement (see the next section). When Yanukovich did not sign the agreement with the EU, it outraged the people, and they went out to protest, as they had done in 2004. This time, they were protesting for Ukraine's European future, for their democratic rights and Russia's non-interference in Ukraine's foreign policy. Of course, the Ukrainians could simply support Yanukovich in his choice of further integration with Russia. From the point of view of Liberal Intergovernmentalism, such a choice would probably be more logical since Russia was Ukraine's largest trading partner and Ukraine was utterly dependent on Russian gas. Indeed, by opting for

further integration with post-Soviet states, Yanukovych was pursuing both economic and geopolitical goals for Ukraine. However, society has chosen European integration, which is not entirely in line with the postulates of Liberal Intergovernmentalism. The economic benefits of further integration with the EU, mainly through the Association Agreement, were limited and could only bring economic benefits to Ukraine in the long term. By contrast, integration with Russia would have had clear and immediate economic and security benefits for the country.

This dissertation argues that identity politics and Ukraine's historical past played an important role in Ukrainian society's choice. For Ukrainians, integration with Russia meant a policy of authoritarianism, corruption and oligarchic power. In 2004, Ukrainians made it clear that they wanted a democratic future for their country. Therefore, the thesis argues that the majority of the Ukrainian population supported European integration because the prospect of European integration was perceived as a means of increasing Ukraine's economic well-being in the future, establishing democratic institutions in the country, and, at the same time, preserving the country's national identity. On the other hand, the prospect of Eurasian integration was perceived as a potential threat to Ukrainian national identity by establishing even closer ties with Russia and deepening Ukraine's economic dependence on Russia.

3.2.3. Interstate Bargaining

Negotiations with the EU for an Association Agreement began in 2007. On December 10, 2012, the Foreign Affairs Council adopted Conclusions on Ukraine, expressing the EU's commitment to signing the Association Agreement, including the DCFTA. This would happen once the Ukrainian authorities show determined action and tangible progress in three areas: elections, selective justice, and overall reforms, as outlined in the Association Agenda. This progress could be demonstrated by the time of the eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November 2013 (European Commission,

2013). Thus, in November 2013, Ukraine was supposed to sign the AA agreement for the EU's eastern Partnership programme at the Vilnius Summit.

During the DCFTA negotiations between Ukraine and the EU in 2013, Russia quickly resorted to pressure tactics. In July, approximately 40 major Ukrainian enterprises were blacklisted by Russian customs. As a result, Russia began inspecting their shipments, leading to delays in delivering goods to customers (Denysenko, 2020). This move was a clear demonstration of Russia's ability to impose economic sanctions should Ukraine proceed with joining the DCFTA (Furman & Libman, 2019). Russia has also sought to influence public opinion, often through Russian-funded organisations such as Ukrainian Choice, contributing to increased criticism of the West in the country. For example, alarming reports in Ukraine about the costs of EU agreements, often circulated ahead of the 2013 Vilnius summit, came directly from the Russian-funded Eurasian Development Bank think tank (Wilson, 2014).

Additionally, Russia decided to create a Eurasian alternative to the EU as an alternative to the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. In 2010, the tripartite (Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan) Customs Union (CU) was established. The key goal for Russia was to ensure Ukraine's membership. Since customs union members cannot unilaterally agree on a free trade agreement, Eurasian countries joining the CU would immediately lose the opportunity to sign the DCFTA and stay in Russia's orbit (Furman & Libman, 2019). This is consistent with LI, which suggests that states that are most invested in an issue, positively or negatively, are more likely to make concessions or offer additional incentives such as payments or ties to persuade others (Moravcsik, 1998).

Under growing Russian pressure, Yanukovych requested increasing amounts of money from the EU as compensation for potential losses for Ukraine. The Yanukovych-led elite in Ukraine expected the West to offer financial support and benefits before, during and after the signing of any agreements (Wilson, 2014, p. 65). Liberal Intergovernmentalism explains this by arguing that actors least dependent on a particular agreement are in the strongest position to use the threat of non-cooperation to force others to make

concessions (Moravcsik, 1998). Therefore, the Yanukovych government was bargaining for a better deal with both the EU and Russia to pursue the utilitarian interests of the state. Since the DCFTA was more in Ukraine's interest than in the EU's, the latter was unwilling to accept Yanukovych's demands, and Russia, on the contrary, was ready to drag Ukraine into the CU at any cost. It is therefore not surprising that the outcome of these interstate negotiations was that Yanukovych rejected the Association Agreement with the EU and accepted Russia's counter-offer of 15 billion US dollars. This decision ultimately sparked anti-government protests across the country (Mearsheimer, 2014).

On February 22, 2014, Yanukovych fled to Russia, and by June, a new pro-western, anti-Russian government was elected in Kyiv (Mearsheimer, 2014). This shift effectively ended any prospect of Ukraine joining the Russian-led Customs Union. For Russia, the Association Agreement marked a crucial step in Ukraine's shift to the West. The situation in Ukraine following the revolution was perceived as a security threat and contradicted Russian geopolitical interests. Russian officials described the Ukrainian protests as unconstitutional and as the work of western-backed extremist groups, while also condemning western interference in Ukraine's internal affairs. At the same time, Russia denied Ukraine's agency and dismissed the protests as a genuine grassroots movement (Raik et al., 2024). Russia was concerned about the continued expansion of the EU and NATO near its borders, as well as the potential loss of its Black Sea Fleet. Overall, the political unrest in Kyiv during the winter of 2013-2014 opened the door for significant geostrategic shifts that altered Ukraine's peaceful path. Following the realist principle of “balance of power”, Russia has calculated that it possesses superior power to Ukraine and thus can act as it chooses concerning that country. When Yanukovych fled to Russia on 22 February, Putin took advantage of the situation to annex Crimea and support radical separatist groups in the Donbas, ultimately sparking the war in eastern Ukraine (Mearsheimer, 2014). Russia justified the annexation of Crimea and the referendum by citing international law, drawing parallels to decisions regarding Kosovo in 1999 (Leonaitė & Žalimas, 2016). Crimea declared independence on March 11, before the referendum, which was not provided for in the Ukrainian constitution.

According to it, any changes in Ukraine's territory should be resolved exclusively by an all-Ukrainian referendum (Fedorenko, 2014).

3.2.4. Institutional Choice

Ukraine and the EU: economic cooperation¹

In the aftermath of the Euromaidan revolution, Ukraine focused its institution-building efforts exclusively on the EU. Russian aggression, the annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine effectively removed any prospect of institutional cooperation with Russia and the broader post-Soviet space. In June 2014, Ukraine's newly elected president, Petro Poroshenko, signed the Association Agreement, marking a step toward deeper integration with the European Union. The Association Agreement outlines two main objectives: the first is the political aspect of integration, paving the way for future EU membership, and the second focuses on the economic aspect. The economic reforms are detailed in the economic section of the Agreement, namely in the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) (European Commission, 2020b).

The Association Agreement outlines cooperation in a number of areas, including energy, public finance, taxation, agriculture, environment, transport, space, science and technology, tourism, security and education. Article 25 provides for the gradual establishment of a free trade area over a transitional period of up to 10 years (*Association Agreement*, 2014). A key aspect of the DCFTA with the EU is its role in aligning Ukraine's regulatory practices with European standards. This includes the harmonisation of Ukrainian legislation with EU rules in areas such as competition, state aid, public procurement, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical regulations, intellectual property rights and sustainable development, covering environmental, labour and social issues (European Commission, 2020b). The Association Agreement laid the groundwork for future trade

¹ The content of this section builds on the research and findings from the master's thesis (Kychak, 2020)

relations, stipulating that any changes to the trade regime must move towards further Liberalisation.

In 2016, the free trade regime between Ukraine and the EU officially came into force. Since April 2014, Ukrainian goods have had duty-free access to the European Union, but this was a temporary, unilateral arrangement under the EU's autonomous trade preferences (Stepanenko & Stepanenko, 2018). The DCFTA between Ukraine and the EU aims to promote the Liberalisation of trade in goods, services, capital and certain aspects of the movement of labour. It eliminates import duties on industrial goods and significantly facilitates trade in agricultural products. Both sides have agreed not to impose or maintain export duties, taxes or similar measures (European Commission, 2015).

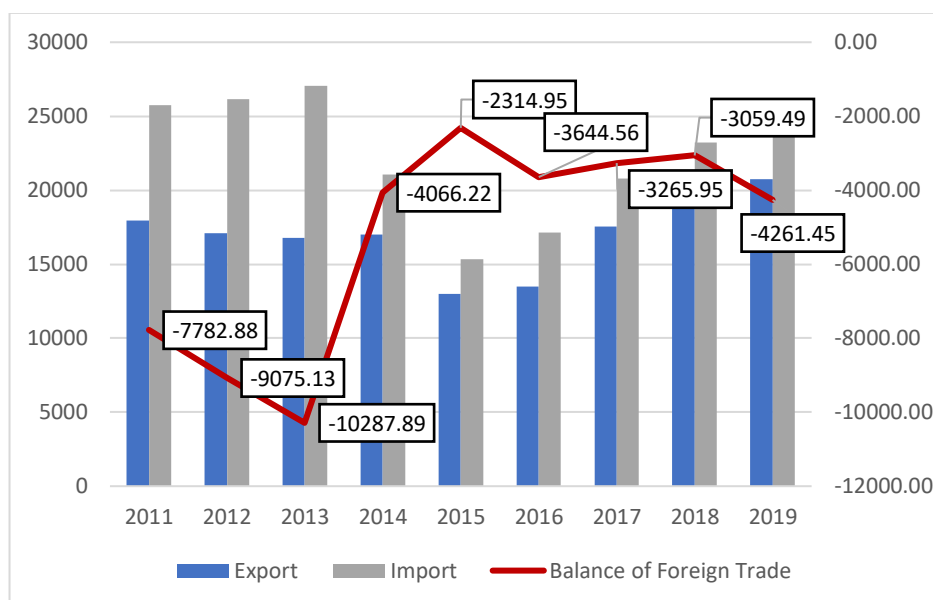
In short, the Association Agreement became the central framework for cooperation between Ukraine and the EU since 2014. On 19 February, Petro Poroshenko signed a law amending the constitution on the state strategic course for Ukraine's full membership in the European Union and NATO (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2019)—this consolidated Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic trajectory at the state level.

After the Euromaidan revolution, the EU became Ukraine's leading trading partner (40.2 per cent share) (European Commission, 2020a). Although Ukraine had a continuous negative balance of foreign trade in goods with the EU between 2011 and 2019, the trade deficit has decreased significantly since 2014, reaching its lowest level in 2015 (2.3 billion US dollars). By comparison, the deficit was highest in 2013, reaching more than USD10 billion (see Figure 18). Trade between Russia and Ukraine has fallen dramatically since 2014 but has not stopped altogether, with Russia being Ukraine's third-largest trading partner in 2019 with 9.1 per cent share (European Commission, 2020a).

Figure 18. shows a significant increase in trade volumes between Ukraine and the EU following the signing of the AA, with a substantial increase in the share of Ukrainian exports and imports in EU trade. The exception is 2015-2016, when both imports and exports to the EU fell. However, Ukraine's total

trade with the world fell by almost 22 per cent in 2014 and by more than 16 per cent in 2015. This was mainly due to the annexation of Crimea and Russia's military actions in eastern Ukraine. The loss of two industrialised regions significantly impacted the country's trade potential.

Figure 18. Ukraine's foreign trade in goods with EU countries in 2011 – 2019, millions of US dollars ²



Source: own construction based on State Statistics Service of Ukraine (1991-2025)

The same trend is observed for GDP, which, according to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (Table 6), experienced a significant decline from 2014 to 2015, adjusted for inflation and expressed in constant 2021 prices, falling by about 7 per cent in 2014 and by about 10 per cent in 2015 compared to the previous year. Already in 2016, when the DCFTA came into effect, Ukraine's GDP started to grow steadily, increasing by 2.4 per cent in 2016 and 2017 and by 3.5 per cent in 2018. Thus, although Ukraine's GDP fell significantly with the start of Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, the signing of the AA and the revival of trade with the EU had a significant impact on the further recovery of the country's economic situation.

² Data for 2014 -2017 exclude the territories temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation and part of the territories where military actions are/have been conducted.

Article 378 of the Association Agreement (2014) outlines the commitment of Ukraine and the EU to strengthen cooperation in the field of industrial and enterprise policy, with a focus on support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This cooperation aims to improve the regulatory framework for enterprises in both regions, in line with EU policies and international best practices.

Table 6. GDP of Ukraine during 2012-2018, in billions of UAH and per cent of the previous year, at the 2021 constant prices ³

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
GDP, bln UAH	1 299	1 404	1 465	1 586	1 988	2 385	2 981	3 560
per cent of the previous year, at the 2021 constant prices	x	100.2	100.0	93.4	90.2	102.4	102,4	103,5

Source: own edition based on State Statistics Service of Ukraine (1991-2025)

One of the key expectations of the DCFTA for Ukrainian SMEs was the implementation of anti-corruption reforms, as well as improved governance and other institutional improvements (Adarov & Havlik, 2017). Moreover, combating corruption is established as a fundamental principle and a key domain of cooperation in the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement (Articles 3 and 14) (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, 2019). In 2014, when the Association Agreement was signed, Ukrainian SMEs perceived the cost of finance, availability of finance (willingness to lend), political instability, corruption, and tax rates as the main challenges facing the Ukrainian business sector (Hellyer et al., 2014).

Since 2017, Ukraine has been supported in its anti-corruption efforts through the EU Anti-Corruption Initiative (EUACI), co-financed by the EU and Denmark. The first phase of the programme (2017–2019), with a budget of EUR 15.84 million (EUACI, 2020), delivered significant outcomes,

³ Data for 2014 -2018 exclude the territories temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation and part of the territories where military actions are/have been conducted.

including the development of a comprehensive legal framework, the establishment of specialised anti-corruption institutions, the creation of the High Anti-Corruption Court, and the introduction of key preventive instruments such as electronic asset declarations and the ProZorro public procurement system. In 2019, the initiative entered a second phase (2020–2025), supported by an additional €15 million, aimed at consolidating reforms, strengthening anti-corruption measures at both national and local levels, and enhancing the role of civil society, the private sector, and citizens in promoting good governance, integrity, and the rule of law (European Commission, 2019; Kychak, 2025).

The European Union has launched the DCFTA eastern Guarantee Facility and the Technical Cooperation Facility to support Ukraine's economic modernisation. Its main objective is to improve the competitiveness of SMEs in local and international markets by providing loan guarantees through local banks backed by the European Investment Fund (EIF) (European Investment Bank, 2020). The initiative is funded by the EU under the EU4Business programme and managed by the European Investment Bank and the EIF (EU4Business, 2019). The Technical Cooperation Facility supports Ukraine's key reforms and the implementation of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, including the DCFTA. Funded through the European Neighbourhood Instrument, with a budget increasing from EUR15 million in 2015 to EUR44 million in 2019 (EEAS Press Team, 2020), it provides policy advice, legal expertise and capacity building in areas such as business development, trade, public procurement, energy, agriculture and government communication (European Commission, 2019). The programme aims to help Ukraine's business sector adapt to significant reforms.

Ukraine and the EU: security dimension

As the EU continued its policy of bringing Ukraine closer to the Union through the eastern Partnership and the signing of the Association Agreement, it also became part of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Moreover, it is undeniable that the Russian-Ukrainian war was essentially about the EU, as it is directly related to Ukraine's decision to move towards European integration. The annexation of Crimea led to significant shifts in EU foreign

policy. First, the EU has provided financial and structural assistance to Ukraine, linking this assistance to Ukraine's progress in implementing reforms based on EU norms and standards, particularly in areas such as the rule of law and good governance. However, these reforms do not guarantee Ukraine's eventual accession to the EU (Chaban et al., 2019). As mentioned, the EU signed the Association Agreement with Ukraine, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), and granted Ukrainian citizens visa-free access to the Schengen area. Moreover, Ukraine and the EU began security cooperation in 2015, with Ukraine proposing an EU monitoring mission under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) to advise on security sector reform, provide strategic guidance and coordinate international assistance (Kornienko, 2017).

The EU has used its diplomatic leverage to cancel high-level meetings with Russia and suspend Russia's membership of the OECD and the International Energy Agency. The EU has also been a mediator in gas supply agreements between the two countries. In addition, the EU engaged in coercive diplomacy through economic sanctions against Russia. In April 2014, the EU imposed its first round of sanctions against Russia, which were later expanded following the downing of flight MH17 in July 2014 (Chaban et al., 2019). The decision to support Ukraine and sanction Russia reflects the firm stance of countries such as Germany, Poland, France, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, partly in response to Russia's actions, which also threatened their security. Meanwhile, sceptics in Italy, Greece, Cyprus, and other countries found themselves in a weaker negotiating position because of their dependence on EU (mainly German) financial support. Despite the high cost and vocal opposition from some governments, the sanctions were imposed unanimously in the Council after intergovernmental negotiations (Moravcsik & Emmons, 2021). The sanctions have been steadily extended against the resistance of some Member States.

Moreover, despite growing awareness in the EU of the problematic energy dependence on Russia, little has been done to reduce it. In fact, Germany pushed ahead with constructing the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which would have further deepened this dependence. As a result, the EU maintained its

sanctions against Russia, but many member states continued to engage in political and economic relations with Russia (Bosse, 2022). Liberal Intergovernmentalism explains such behaviour of states by arguing that the process of integration is primarily shaped by national preferences, aiming to improve and maximise national welfare in specific areas.

When the war in eastern Ukraine began in 2014, the EU was not only reluctant to get directly involved but also refrained from officially calling it a war. The EU did impose sanctions on Russia, but these were relatively mild and did not include extensive economic penalties. Even after Russian officials openly admitted to seizing Crimea by military force, the EU did not reconsider its initial approach to sanctions. It can be argued that back in 2014, the situation in both Crimea and Kyiv was very chaotic, and the nature of events remained unclear. However, the attack on the Ukrainian ships in 2018 presented a different scenario, where Russian aggression was evident and transparent. However, the EU did not recognise it as an open act of aggression and waited almost three months to announce sanctions against those responsible for this event (Kruk, 2019). The EU also played a passive role in the conflict resolution process, with France and Germany mediating in the ad hoc 'Normandy format' involving Ukraine and Russia. Although the EU supported the Normandy format, it was not an EU-led diplomatic initiative, with France and Germany participating as individual countries rather than official EU representatives (Raik et al., 2024). LI sees this as a response to states' different security interests and preferences, which complicate decision-making within the EU institutions.

Overall, while the EU sought to bring Ukraine closer to the West, a complete breakdown of EU relations with Russia was not seen at the time as an effective way to achieve this goal. Despite the Euromaidan movement, the Russian seizure of Crimea, the incursion into Donbas, and the hybrid aggression against Ukraine, the EU institutions and a majority of member states persistently regarded Ukraine merely as a neighbouring country to Russia. They expected Ukraine to resolve its security and economic challenges, which were brought about by Russia, through negotiations while considering the interests of the aggressor (Haran & Burkovskyi, 2022). While

condemning Russia's actions and imposing sanctions, the EU has not been directly involved in diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict. However, it has supported the Minsk agreements mediated by France and Germany (Raik et al., 2024). Nevertheless, while it is fair to say that the western response to Russian aggression in 2014 was weak and ineffective, it is evident that the EU policy toward Ukraine has changed significantly since the Orange Revolution of 2004.

In sum, since 2014, significant changes have taken place as Ukraine has, for the first time, really started implementing the necessary reforms and working seriously on the integration process with the EU. The most important prerequisite was that Russia's annexation of Crimea and occupation of eastern Ukraine convinced the majority of even the previously pro-Russian part of Ukrainian society that the only real alternative and necessary condition for a decent life was the country's Euro-Atlantic integration.

To summarise this chapter, the 2004 revolution, for the first time, raised the question of whether European integration could be considered a priority for national foreign policy, while the 2014 revolution solidified this decision, making it the country's final and irreversible political trajectory. Although the country actively participated in the European Neighbourhood Policy and later the eastern Partnership in 2004, the Yushchenko government pursued a "balanced" foreign policy, ultimately seeking Ukraine's membership in the EU while maintaining close ties with Russia. With the onset of Russian aggression after Euromaidan, Ukrainian-Russian relations virtually collapsed. After that, the Eurasian vector of Ukraine's foreign policy was not on the agenda. Subsequent Ukrainian presidents (Poroshenko and Zelenskyi) and governments were consolidated concerning Ukraine's European choice.

Both in the 2004 and 2014 revolutions, society primarily determined the preference for European integration. In 2004, when Ukrainians first protested for their right to democratic elections, Ukraine's choice of European integration was not the main issue. However, it emerged as one of the people's demands to the government during the revolution. On the other hand, the Russian attack in response to Euromaidan changed the opinion of even many Russian-speaking Ukrainians regarding the integration vector. It completely

changed the attitude of Ukrainians towards Russia, leading to the development of a new Ukrainian identity paradigm. Since 2014, Ukrainians have been more united than ever in their views on the direction of the country's foreign policy and economic development.

The dissertation argues that Liberal Intergovernmentalism is generally valuable for analysing Ukraine's European integration processes during the Orange Revolution and Euromaidan. In particular, LI is useful for analysing the negotiation process between Ukraine and Russia after the Orange Revolution and for understanding Yushchenko's 'balanced' foreign policy approach. It also comprehensively explains the process of the Yanukovych government's negotiations with the EU and Russia before the Vilnius Summit, where it was expected to sign the Association Agreement. It also provides a convincing account of the institutionalisation of EU-Ukraine relations after Euromaidan, particularly about the AA and the DCFTA.

However, the LI cannot explain the crucial role of identity politics in shaping Ukraine's trajectory towards European integration. Liberal Intergovernmentalism assumes that states primarily pursue economic interests in international relations. Accordingly, it would have been more beneficial for Ukraine, both economically and in terms of security, to choose the Eurasian direction since Russia was Ukraine's largest trading partner and Ukraine was almost entirely dependent on Russian gas. After the Orange Revolution, Ukraine suffered significant economic losses as a result of gas wars with Russia and a massive increase in gas prices for Ukraine. After the 2014 revolution, Ukraine suffered significant security losses, including the loss of territory, which led to economic losses. Ukraine lost its largest trading partner and was forced to urgently seek new partners. However, despite these risks, society chose European integration, which does not fully correspond to the postulates of Liberal Intergovernmentalism.

4. THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OF UKRAINE SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE FULL-SCALE INVASION BY RUSSIA

This chapter assesses the current state of Ukraine's integration into the EU, particularly after Russia's full-scale invasion. It focuses on the institutionalisation of EU-Ukraine relations and progress towards deeper European integration and eventual membership. The comprehensive analysis provides a detailed overview of Ukraine's complex geopolitical trajectory, its challenges in pursuing European integration, and the significant role of internal and external factors in shaping this process. The analysis is structured around three stages of Liberal Intergovernmentalism: the formation of national preferences, intergovernmental negotiations and institutionalisation. This framework allows for a detailed study of the dynamics of Ukraine-EU relations and illustrates how these causal mechanisms influenced the process of Ukraine's European integration.

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine. The invasion followed years of rising tensions between the two countries, which started with Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its aggression in eastern Ukraine. The war has caused widespread destruction, significant human casualties, displacement of millions of civilians and severe economic disruption. As of October 2024, according to the International Organization for Migration, there are approximately 3.5 million Internally Displaced Persons in Ukraine (International Organization for Migration, 2024). As of December 16, 2024, the UN reported that 6.8 million Ukrainians worldwide had registered for temporary protection after fleeing abroad (UNHCR, 2024). The invasion has also provoked a strong international response, with western countries imposing sanctions on Russia and providing military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

4.1. National Preferences Formation

Society Preferences

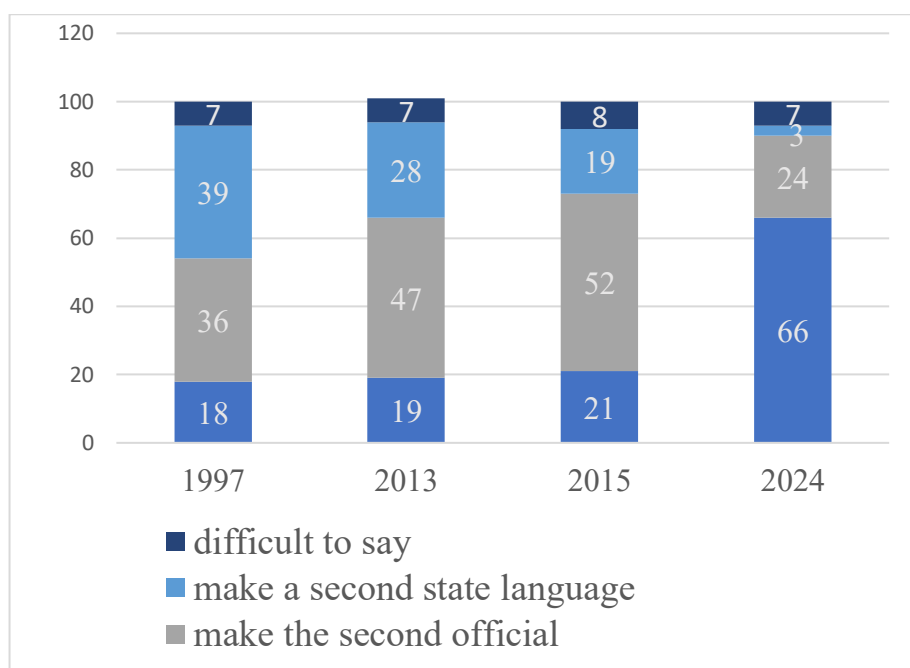
The majority of Ukrainians supported EU integration even before the Russian invasion in 2022. In 2019, the majority of Ukrainians, about 70 per cent, voted for Zelenskyi, who was a pro-western candidate and advocated further EU integration. According to the Razumkov Centre (2024), support for European integration was 55.6 per cent in 2021. Since 2014, the level of support for EU integration has been relatively stable and has been above 50 per cent. However, with the outbreak of a full-scale war, this support increased to an unprecedented level, reaching 78.4 per cent. In 2023, support has slightly decreased but remains very high, about 73.7 per cent (Figure 17).

The war in Ukraine has brought about significant changes in national consciousness and identity. In the early months of the war, Ukrainian society showed an unprecedented degree of unity. Traditional divisions, including linguistics, seemed to fade. In the first months of the conflict, there was overwhelming support for the actions of the president and the government. In the initial stages of the war with Russia, approximately 90 per cent of Ukrainians trusted the government's response, according to the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology. However, the situation has shifted significantly throughout the three-year conflict, with some 52 per cent of Ukrainians expressing confidence in the president's policies (KIIS, 2025). Moreover, Ukrainians have become more aware of their history and culture and have developed a stronger sense of patriotism and unity. Civil society is evolving rapidly, with deeper links forged between citizens and public organisations, increasing their political influence. However, after three years of conflict, social tensions have risen significantly, and issues such as language are once again coming to the surface and are essential to address.

As Figure 19 shows, the full-scale war with Russia has triggered a significant shift in Ukrainians' attitudes towards the Russian language. Over 60 per cent of Ukrainians now believe that the Russian language should be removed from official use. This is a dramatic change, especially considering that public opinion on this issue has remained relatively stable since 1997,

when only around 20 per cent of Ukrainians held this view. In particular, only 3 per cent of Ukrainians now believe that Russian should be a second state language, a sharp decline from 39 per cent in 1997 and 19 per cent in 2015 following the Euromaidan revolution (KIIS, 2024). Moreover, numerous Ukrainians who speak Russian as their native language have transitioned to using Ukrainian in their daily lives. Among the surveyed Ukrainians, 70.5 per cent of respondents talk only or mainly Ukrainian at home; in 2015, there were 50 per cent, and in 2006 – 46 per cent (Razumkov Centre, 2024b). This shift is driven by the desire of Ukrainians to disassociate themselves from Russian culture and distance themselves from the aggressor. In short, the status of the Russian language has become a significant factor in determining the ethno-national identity of Ukrainian society.

Figure 19. What should the state policy be regarding the Russian language in Ukraine?



Source: own construction based on KIIS (2024)

Since the outbreak of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the regional divisions that once characterised the country have diminished significantly. In the traditionally Russian-speaking regions - eastern and southern Ukraine - a growing majority now supports the removal of Russian from official use. Specifically, 54 per cent of respondents in southern Ukraine and 40 per cent

in eastern Ukraine support this change, a striking contrast to 2015, when only 13 per cent and 3 per cent respectively in these regions held the same view. In addition, only about 6 per cent of people in these regions believe that Russian should be introduced as a second state language, a dramatic shift compared to the aftermath of the Euromaidan revolution when 31 per cent in the east and 37 per cent in the south supported this idea (see Table 7). As a result, the long-standing East-West divide is fading away, and Ukrainian society is now more united on the issue of language than ever.

Ukrainians also remain united and determined in their collective support for the country's integration into the European Union, which they see as a vital step towards a prosperous and democratic future. A sociological survey conducted shortly before the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (in 2021) showed that about 55.6 per cent of Ukrainian citizens surveyed favour Ukraine's integration into the European Union (Razumkov Centre, 2024a). Thus, before the full-scale invasion, Ukrainians' determination to resist Russian pressure and continue with European integration remained unchanged, with support at roughly the same level as in 2014 (Figure 17). This was despite Russia's continued belligerent actions against Ukraine, including the complete blockade of the Sea of Azov in 2018, the issuance of Russian passports to individuals residing in the occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and open threats of invasion (Haran & Burkovskyi, 2022).

Table 7. What should the state policy be regarding the Russian language in Ukraine? Regional dimension

Russian language should be:	West			South			East		
	2013	2015	2024	2013	2015	2024	2013	2015	2024
removed from the official use	45	42	80	7	13	54	2	3	40
second official	38	44	15	44	43	30	51	61	43
second state language	10	6	1	42	37	6	43	31	6
difficult to say	6	8	4	7	7	9	4	5	11

Source: own edition based on KIIS (2024)

Since the outbreak of full-scale war, support for Ukraine's EU membership has reached unprecedented levels. Research by the Razumkov Centre shows that since 2022, over 70 per cent of Ukrainians have supported the country's accession to the EU (Figure 17). According to a KIIS survey conducted in May 2023, 92 per cent of Ukrainians want Ukraine to become a member of the EU. Security concerns primarily drive this overwhelming support. The Russian-Ukrainian war has brought security issues to the forefront for Ukrainians, and for many, EU membership is a symbol of security guarantees. This is also reflected in the results of nationwide surveys. According to the KIIS poll, among the identified motives (Figure 20), the two most important are ensuring long-term security (59 per cent of respondents include this in their top 3 motives) and economic prospects (57 per cent). In addition, one in five respondents considers the future of democracy in Ukraine the most critical motive. Ensuring the rule of law (45 per cent) and international recognition of Ukraine's place in Europe (41 per cent) are among the least essential motives for the respondents.

Figure 20. Motives for Ukraine's membership in the EU



Source: own construction based on KIIS (2024)

Moreover, when asked what Ukraine's priority should be - membership in the EU or NATO - 54 per cent of Ukrainians surveyed believe that NATO membership is currently a higher priority, compared to 24 per cent for EU

membership (KIIS, 2023). This result only confirms that the security factor is crucial to Ukrainians' support for European integration.

Thus, it is important to stress that the primary motivations for European integration among Ukrainians are primarily utilitarian - security and economic benefits. This is in line with the theory of Liberal Intergovernmentalism. However, ideological factors also play an important role, with democratic values, the rule of law and Ukraine's European identity being key elements that Ukrainians associate with the EU.

Overall, the conflict has strengthened and accelerated support for Ukraine's European integration among its citizens. On the one hand, the destruction of infrastructure, economic decline, rising unemployment, war casualties and corruption scandals have negatively affected public sentiment and fostered growing mistrust of the authorities. On the other hand, there are also positive trends: society is becoming more united and national self-awareness is growing. Most Ukrainians now identify strongly with their national identity, and there is a rising interest in Ukrainian history, language, and culture. The overwhelming majority of citizens are in favour of further European integration. As a result, the gap between Russia and Ukraine continues to widen, and Ukraine's path towards EU integration is moving faster than ever.

Political Elites' Preferences

Unlike the Orange Revolution and Euromaidan, which failed to change the political elite. Zelenskyi's victory in the 2019 elections was another protest by the Ukrainian people against old-style politicians who had failed to deliver on their election promises. With Zelenskyi's election, the country's presidency was for the first time in the hands of a person untainted by corruption, oligarchy or Russian alliances (Moravcsik & Emmons, 2021). Zelenskyi was the first president since Kravchuk's victory in 1991 to be supported by a majority of the population in all regions of Ukraine except Lviv Oblast in the west, with the highest levels of support coming from the south and east of Ukraine (see Figure 9). Thus, for the first time, Ukraine was united during the 2019 presidential elections, this time without an east-west divide. Zelenskyi's

presidency marked the unity of Ukrainians in choosing a foreign policy of European integration. Zelenskyi came to power with a pro-European agenda and was supported in the country's east and west.

During the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, the Ukrainian government's national foreign policy priorities and President Zelenskyi's administration are European and Euro-Atlantic integration. In December 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the Communication Strategy on Ukraine's European Integration for the period up to 2026. Developed with expert assistance from the EU's Association4U project and the Office of Reforms, the strategy aims to maintain and gradually increase support for Ukraine's EU accession among Ukrainian and EU citizens. It outlines a coordinated approach to communication between the state and citizens at international, national and local levels. It is based on a communication audit of state bodies implementing the Association Agreement (Romaniuk, 2023). In terms of security, the priority national interests of the Zelenskyi government are building a strategic and military-political partnership with the European Union, the United States and other states, active participation in the UN and other international organisations, achieving victory in the war, restoring territorial integrity and holding Russia accountable for aggression and international crimes.

Despite the ongoing war, the Ukrainian government continues to pursue the path of European integration and seeks to strengthen its dialogue with the EU. Efforts include deepening sectoral integration, renewing the Association Agreement, Liberalising trade and economic relations with the European Union, and more. One of Ukraine's most significant achievements in sectoral integration is its entry into the EU energy market. Specifically, the process of synchronising Ukraine's unified energy system with the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E), which connects 43 operators in 36 European countries, began in 2021. Despite martial law, this process was completed in March 2022. Both Ukraine and the EU benefit from the "energy visa-free regime". It provides Ukraine with an additional source of export revenue through electricity exports to the EU from 1 June 2022, while the EU reduces its dependence on Russian energy.

However, following the heavy shelling of Ukrainian energy infrastructure in October 2022, electricity exports were suspended. Since 1 January 2023, Ukraine has been able to import electricity from abroad to cover its critical energy deficit, thanks to its connection to the European energy grid (Romaniuk, 2023).

On 23 June 2022, Ukraine was granted candidate status for EU membership. The Commission's recommendation to the European Council to grant Ukraine 'candidate' status was accompanied by a call for urgent reforms in seven key areas: the judiciary, the rule of law, anti-corruption measures, the rights of national minorities, anti-money laundering legislation, anti-oligarchy legislation and media legislation in line with the EU acquis (Petrov, 2023). It should be noted that fulfilling these conditions is vital for Ukraine to accelerate its accession to the EU and improve its economic situation, which is particularly important in the context of the ongoing war with Russia. After all, these are the areas that are extremely important for foreign investors, especially in foreign direct investment (FDI), and their fulfilment is in the national economic interest of Ukraine. Therefore, fulfilling the requirements in these seven areas is among the foremost national interests of Ukraine, supported by both the society and the government.

Despite the war, Ukraine has made significant progress in implementing these recommendations (more details in the last section). In particular, on 13 December 2022, the Verkhovna Rada adopted several key laws on European integration, including the 'Law on the Media' and the 'Law on National Minorities (Communities)', as well as the On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine to Clarify Provisions on Competitive Selection of Candidates for The Position of a Judge of The Constitutional Court of Ukraine (Razumkov Centre, 2022).

National Preferences

Even before the outbreak of full-scale war, Ukrainian society and political elites had consolidated their national preferences for European integration. This is evidenced by the election of Volodymyr Zelenskyi as President of Ukraine, supported by both the East and the West (see Chapter 2). However,

the war significantly accelerated the process of Ukraine's European integration. It reinforced the understanding among society and political elites that there is no alternative to the EU path, making any eastward integration impossible. Although Ukraine's aspirations to join the EU were apparent, the country did not seriously consider a formal application for membership before the Russian invasion. Paradoxically, Russia's aggression became the catalyst for Ukraine's desire to pursue the path of EU membership and made it a reality (Petrov, 2023). Ukraine formally applied for membership in the European Union in February 2022 and was granted EU candidate status in June of the same year. Hence, in the midst of the war, the country achieved EU candidate status, advanced its European integration in various sectors, strengthened its partnership with the EU and continued to implement the European Commission's recommendations and the terms of the Association Agreement. Meeting the Commission's recommendations is currently the country's main national economic priority, supported by society and the political elite.

Such consolidation between political elites and society aligns with Liberal Intergovernmentalism. Since the beginning of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, any economic relations between the countries were impossible, and it was in the country's economic interests to deepen integration with the EU. Therefore, the consolidation of society and political elites is natural and necessary in terms of both the state's security and economic priorities.

4.2. Interstate Bargaining

Ukraine's EU application received an immediate and positive response from the EU institutions. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen declared that Ukraine was "one of us" and should be part of the European Union. The European Parliament later adopted a resolution urging the EU institutions to pursue the granting of candidate status to Ukraine based on merit under Article 49 of the EU Treaty. In the aftermath of the Russian invasion, the leaders of eleven Central and eastern European EU member states that had joined the EU since 2004 also expressed support for Ukraine's

accession. Eight of these countries issued a joint statement calling for immediate action to grant Ukraine EU candidate status and open accession negotiations. While other EU member states also supported Ukraine's application, some were more cautious, noting that the process could take considerable time (Fella, 2024). LI explains that coalitions of willing outside EU structures occur because states often have divergent preferences and may be indifferent to certain outcomes in areas such as security.

On 7 March, the Council asked the European Commission to assess Ukraine's application and sent a questionnaire to determine its readiness. By May, Ukraine had submitted its answers, and on 17 June, the Commission recommended granting candidate status, citing Ukraine's progress in implementing its Association Agreement with the EU. Later that month, the European Council formally granted Ukraine candidate status, despite President Zelenskyi's call for Ukraine's "immediate accession" through a special procedure. The European Council stressed that progress would depend on Ukraine's ability to meet the Copenhagen criteria and the EU's capacity to integrate new members (Fella, 2024). This is also consistent with LI, which argues that the development of integration depends solely on national preferences and decisions made at intergovernmental meetings.

Despite the continuing war, the Council of the EU recognised in December 2023 that Ukraine had advanced considerably towards meeting EU accession requirements. However, it noted that further action was needed in areas such as the fight against corruption. At its meeting on 14 and 15 December, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations with Ukraine. The Council was invited to adopt a negotiating framework once Ukraine had taken the steps set out in the Commission's recommendations of 8 November (Fella, 2024).

Hence, negotiations between Ukraine and the EU focus on Ukraine's potential membership. EU membership requires Ukraine, as a candidate state, to satisfy the Copenhagen criteria, which are grounded in the principles and conditions articulated in Articles 49 and 6(1) of the Treaty on European Union. These criteria include ensuring stable democratic institutions, the rule of law, human rights, and minority protection; having a functioning market

economy capable of competing within the EU; and the ability to adopt and implement EU laws and policies, including commitments to political, economic, and monetary union. Moreover, Ukraine must implement the Commission's recommendations to the European Council, undertaking reforms in seven areas: judiciary and rule of law, anti-corruption, minority rights, anti-money laundering, anti-oligarchy, and media legislation, in line with the EU *acquis* (Petrov, 2023). The pace and direction of the accession negotiations will depend on Ukraine's progress in meeting these conditions.

4.3. Institutional Choice

With the beginning of a full-scale war in 2022, a new stage has begun in relations between Ukraine and the EU. First, the extensive invasion solidified the complete fragmentation between Ukraine and Russia. Amid the war, Russian-Ukrainian relations have virtually ceased to exist, making the development of institutional ties between the two countries impossible. The only focus of these relations is the possible signing of a peace agreement, which will undoubtedly influence the future institutional framework and shape Ukraine's relations with Russia and the EU. The eventual Ukrainian-Russian peace agreement will mark the end of hostilities and play a crucial role in determining Ukraine's future EU membership. The terms of such an agreement will inevitably influence the pace and priorities of Ukraine's EU integration process (Petrov, 2023).

Second, the EU's response to Russia's war against Ukraine in 2022 has been described by many as unprecedented in scale and unexpected in speed, demonstrating rare unity among its member states (Bosse, 2022). Unlike the EU's delayed and relatively tolerant response to the war in Ukraine in 2014, which did not involve wide-ranging economic sanctions against Russia, the EU's response in 2022 was much tougher and placed much more significant financial burdens on member states. Actions included providing economic, military, humanitarian and emergency assistance to Ukraine. The European Commission played a key leading role, working closely with the diplomatic community, the US, the UK and other allies (Raik et al., 2024).

Since February 2022, the EU has gradually imposed a range of sanctions on Russia, including individual, economic, and diplomatic measures and restrictions on the media. The Council has so far agreed on 15 rounds of sanctions (European Council, 2024). These measures have undoubtedly come at a high cost to the EU population, particularly in the energy sector, where a sharp rise in prices in 2022 has caused inflation in Europe (Raik et al., 2024). The EU's unity and collective action are, therefore, striking, especially given the different historical views of Russia among its member states. The pace and content of the EU sanctions packages were strongly influenced by the severe actions of Russian troops in Ukraine, in particular, the war crimes committed in Bucha, which forced the EU to take stronger measures (Bosse, 2022). These crimes led to the rapid adoption of the 5th sanctions package. However, subsequent packages, particularly the sixth, were more difficult to pass because of diverging national interests and dependence on Russian imports. The sixth package, which included a ban on Russian coal and oil imports, faced significant opposition, particularly from Hungary, which eventually secured an exemption for Russian crude oil. Similar disagreements arose over the ninth package, where western European countries pushed for exemptions, while Poland and the Baltic states argued for stricter measures. A compromise was finally reached at the European Council in December. These negotiations reflect the dynamics of Liberal Intergovernmentalism, where short-term bargaining and divergent national preferences shape EU decision-making (Håkansson, 2024).

Similarly, the European Union took a historic step by introducing the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) for the first time. This directive gives Ukrainian citizens and permanent residents the right to live, work, and access medical care, housing and education within the EU for three years without going through burdensome asylum procedures. The European Union activated the TPD on 4 March 2022 to offer immediate and effective protection to people fleeing the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. More than 4 million people were granted immediate protection in the EU, out of which more than 3 million in the first half of 2022 (European Commission, 2023). Under the TPD, Ukrainian nationals and permanent residents are now given the privilege to reside, work, and immediately access healthcare,

housing, and education. This right is granted without the need for lengthy asylum procedures for a period ranging from one to three years. The TPD is based on a 2001 EU law formulated following the Balkan wars. Its purpose was to enhance the EU's ability to handle significant influxes of refugees seeking entry, and it included a system for redistributing refugees among EU member states based on each government's capacity. However, the directive was never put into practice until 2022 (Minakov, 2022). The EU's prompt and unanimous decision to implement it was particularly remarkable, considering that migration has historically caused divisions within the EU.

The full-scale Russian invasion shattered western European illusions about Russia's intentions and exposed the Kremlin's imperialist ambitions as a direct threat to European security and democracy (Raik et al., 2024). In response, the EU quickly offered Ukraine and other countries vulnerable to Russian influence a more straightforward path to membership. Within days of the invasion, Ukraine submitted its application to join the EU, and in June 2022, the European Council granted candidate status to Ukraine (Fella, 2024). The speed of this decision marked a significant change, as it is unlikely that such a move would have been made in pre-war conditions. Before the invasion, the Commission's annual reports on Ukraine's implementation of the Association Agreement were not overly optimistic, and even Ukraine's internal assessments were modest. If the Commission and the European Council had been asked to assess Ukraine's readiness for EU membership before February 2022, their opinion would probably have been less favourable. Therefore, granting candidate status can be seen mainly as moral and geopolitical support to bolster Ukraine's resistance to Russian aggression (Petrov, 2023).

The scale of EU military assistance has also been unprecedented. In response to the escalating war in Ukraine, the EU launched the European Union Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM Ukraine) in November 2022, initially to train 15,000 Ukrainian soldiers. Hungary was the only member state to abstain due to concerns about potential escalation. The mission was expanded to train 30,000 Ukrainian soldiers by February 2023. There was also a significant shift in the use of the European Peace Facility (EPF), which

allowed the EU to reimburse member states for providing arms to Ukraine - an issue previously divisive within the EU and NATO. While military assistance was limited and controversial from 2014 to 2022, the EPF became the primary funding mechanism after February 2022, bringing EU and member state support to Ukraine to a total of EUR27 billion by November 2023. Thus, by supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity and EU membership, the EU became directly involved in the conflict. Since 24 February, the EU abandoned its previous stance of avoiding geopolitical competition with Russia and, for the first time, took a clear position in support of Ukraine. The EU mobilised substantial support to resist Russia's aggression, signalling a significant shift towards a more assertive geopolitical role, away from its usual position as a mediator in external conflicts (Raik et al., 2024).

One of the key areas of EU assistance to Ukraine is the support of the country's recovery, reconstruction and modernisation. In 2024, the EU launched the Ukraine Facility, a financial assistance mechanism for 2024-2027 to support Ukraine's recovery, reconstruction and modernisation. The facility will provide up to EUR50 billion in stable financial assistance and up to EUR33 billion in loans financed by EU bonds. It will help Ukraine maintain public services, stimulate private sector investment, implement reforms for EU accession, and address the social consequences of the war. To access this assistance, Ukraine must implement its recovery and reform plan while maintaining democratic mechanisms, including a multi-party parliamentary system and the rule of law (European Commission, 2024a). A total of EUR16.5 billion in direct assistance has been made available to Ukraine in 2024, of which EUR16.4 billion has already been disbursed. In addition, under the Ukraine Investment Framework, the first EUR1.4 billion of grant and guarantee agreements were signed at the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Berlin in June to support Ukraine's recovery and attract private sector investment. This will enable the International Financial Institutions to help financial intermediaries and final beneficiaries in Ukraine with a total of EUR3.2 billion. The focus will be on repairing, rehabilitating, and developing energy and transport infrastructure, supporting municipalities and improving access to finance for SMEs. Moreover, in 2023, the EU provided EUR19.5 billion in assistance to Ukraine, including a significant EUR18 billion in

concessional loans, on top of EUR11.6 billion in loans and grants from 2022. This assistance helped Ukraine cover wages and pensions, restore vital infrastructure, maintain public services such as hospitals and schools, and ensure macroeconomic stability. In addition, EUR1 billion was mobilised for rapid recovery and guarantee agreements were signed with international financial institutions, potentially unlocking over EUR800 million in private sector investment for Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction (European Commission. Directorate General for Communication., 2025).

While Liberal Intergovernmentalism provides a robust explanation for the EU's sanctions policy in 2014, this thesis argues that it offers a less convincing account of the differences in the EU's responses to the conflicts in 2014 and 2022. In 2014, the conflict seemed distant and uncertain, surrounded by many open questions and doubts. It was highly politicised, making the adoption of sanctions difficult. By 2022, however, Russia's invasion was not only a blatant act of aggression but also a direct threat to European security. This shift in perception helped depoliticise the issue of sanctions and other previously contentious matters, leading to swift decision-making. Moreover, this shift can be seen through the lens of identity politics. In 2014, the annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine were perceived as distant events, often framed as an internal Ukrainian conflict and not explicitly referred to as a war. As a result, many Europeans felt detached from the issue. In 2022, when the war reached the EU's borders, the situation became much more immediate and personal, prompting a quicker and more unified response.

4.4. The Current State of Ukraine's Integration with the EU

Until 2022, the Association Agreement was the primary document used to assess Ukraine's progress towards European integration. From 2022 onwards, it is reasonable to consider the "European Commission's Recommendations on Ukraine's Acquisition of Candidate Status for Membership" as the key document, calling for reforms in seven areas: judiciary and rule of law, anti-corruption, minority rights, anti-money

launders, anti-oligarchy, and media legislation, all aligned with the EU acquis (Petrov, 2023). It should be noted that fulfilling these conditions is essential not only for Ukraine to accelerate its accession to the EU but also to improve its economic situation, which is particularly important in the context of the ongoing war with Russia. After all, these are the areas that are extremely important for foreign investors, especially in foreign direct investment (FDI), and their fulfilment is in the national economic interest of Ukraine. Therefore, fulfilling the requirements in these seven areas is among the main national preferences of Ukraine, supported by both the society and the government.

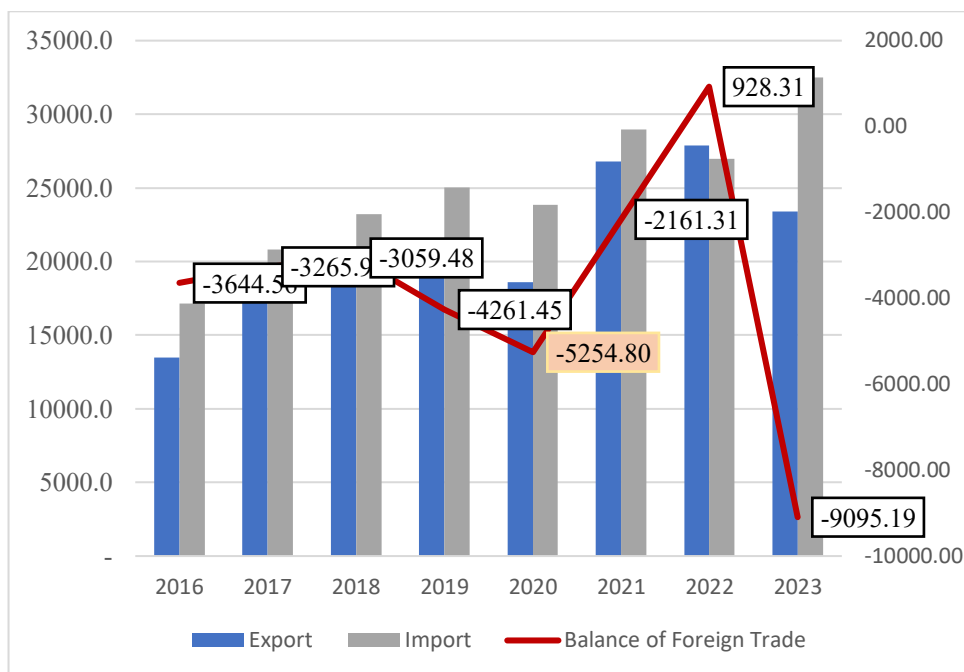
4.4.1. Assessment of the Implementation of the Association Agreement

The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement has been, and remains, crucial in fostering and advancing Ukraine's integration with the EU (Petrov, 2023). Although the economic consequences of the war will also complicate Ukraine's concrete progress in its potential accession process, further implementation of the requirements of the AA and DCFTA will bring Ukraine closer to meeting the Copenhagen criteria (Van der Loo & Van Elsuwege, 2022).

In 2023, Ukraine ranked 16th in total trade with the EU, 24th in imports and 13th in exports. The EU remained Ukraine's largest trading partner, accounting for 55.9 per cent of trade. China was the second partner with 12.9 per cent, while Turkey was the third with 7.1 per cent (European Commission, 2024b). Thus, the EU remains Ukraine's priority trade partner since the Association Agreement's signing in 2014. Notably, in 2022, for the first time since the signing of the DCFTA in 2016, Ukraine had a positive trade balance with the EU, as shown in Figure 21. However, in 2023, this indicator had already dropped significantly, reaching the highest trade deficit with the EU since the signature of the DCFTA and approximately the level of 2012 (see Figure 18). It also shows that the volume of trade between the EU and Ukraine fell slightly in 2022, as Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 disrupted the country's supply chains. Nevertheless, since the entry into force

of the DCFTA in 2016, trade between Ukraine and the EU has improved significantly and continues to grow despite the Russian invasion.

Figure 21. Ukraine's foreign trade in goods with EU countries in 2018 – 2023, millions of US dollars



Source: own construction based on State Statistics Service of Ukraine (1991-2025)

In contrast to 2019, when Russia was a third trading partner for Ukraine with a 9.1 per cent share (European Commission, 2020a), following the full-scale war with Russia, all trade relations with Russia were discontinued. Thus, with the Russian invasion in February 2022, the EU emerged as Ukraine's sole and primary trading partner in the region.

Ukraine's exports to the EU consist mainly of raw materials, especially from the mining and metallurgical sector (such as rocks and ferrous metals), and agricultural products such as wheat, maize and sunflower seeds. In 2023, around 64 per cent of Ukraine's exports to the EU were primary goods, of which around 31 per cent were agricultural products and only 34 per cent were manufactured goods (European Commission, 2024b). Meanwhile, Ukraine's imports from the EU are mainly high-tech products and complex chemical compounds. Overall, Ukraine's imports remain more diversified and technologically advanced than its exports.

Since signing the DCFTA in 2016, Ukraine's GDP has grown steadily (Table 8), except for 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and 2022, when a full-scale war with Russia broke out. In 2023, despite the war, Ukraine's GDP grew by 5.5 per cent compared to the previous year, calculated at constant 2021 prices.

Table 8. GDP of Ukraine during 2012-2018, in billions of UAH and per cent of the previous year, at the 2021 constant prices ⁴

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
GDP, bln UAH	2 385	2 981	3 560	3 977	4 222	5 450	5 239	6 627
per cent of the previous year, at the 2021 constant prices		102,4	103,5	103,2	96,2	103,4	71,2	105,5

Source: own edition based on State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 1991-2025

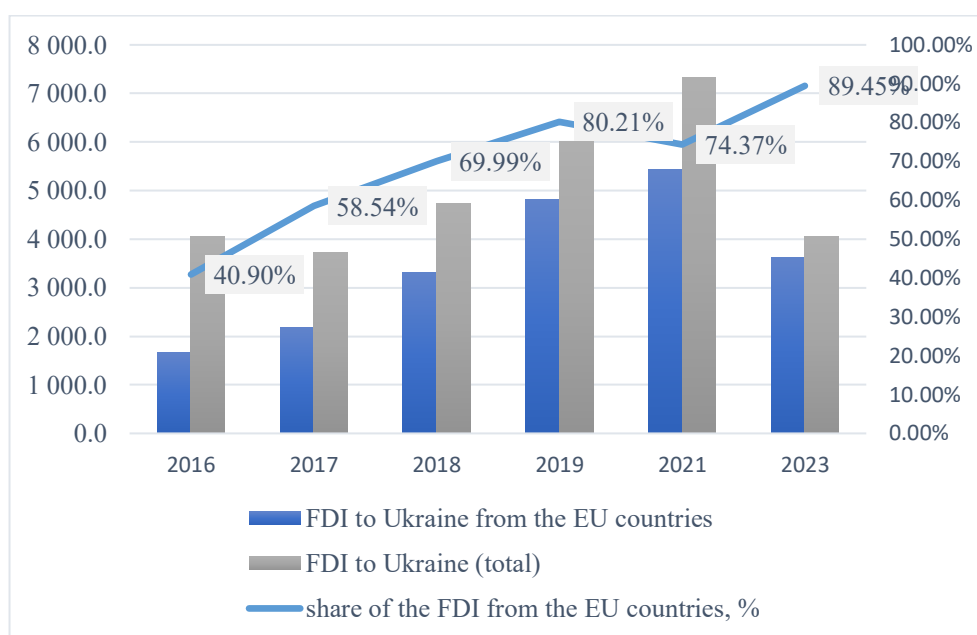
Attracting foreign investment, stimulating the country's innovation potential, and developing the industry and services sphere are more critical than ever. In 2023, Ukraine's investment climate saw a sharp decline, with FDI falling by 44 per cent compared to 2021, largely due to the ongoing Russian invasion. In 2018, total FDI was only USD4.048 billion, of which USD3.622 billion came from the European Union(*State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 1991-2025*). Investing in a country at war carries significant risks, which is reflected in the decline in foreign investment.

In 2023, EU countries accounted for the largest share of investments in Ukraine, a trend that has been stable and constantly increasing since 2016 (Figure 22). According to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, in 2023, FDI from Russia amounted to about USD 10 million, about 0.24 per cent of the total amount of FDI in Ukraine from abroad, which is a record low. Contrarily, in 2018, even after the Euromaidan Revolution and the beginning of Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine, Russia was the 7th largest investor in Ukraine's

⁴ Data exclude the territories temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation and part of the territories where military actions are/have been conducted.

economy, with investments totaling USD 1,008 million, and in 2013, Russia was the third-largest investor with USD 3,040 million. As a result, Russian investment has all but disappeared since the outbreak of full-scale war, while the EU has consolidated its position as Ukraine's main investment partner.

Figure 22. Trends of the FDI from the EU countries to Ukraine (USD, million), and its share of the total FDI to Ukraine (per cent)



Source: own construction based on National Bank of Ukraine, 1991-2025

4.4.2. Status of the Implementation of the European Commission's Recommendations: Anti-Corruption Reforms

As an EU candidate country, Ukraine must fulfil key accession criteria, foremost among them demonstrating real and sustained progress in combating corruption. Anti-corruption reforms are central to Ukraine's European integration, as corruption has long constituted one of the country's most pressing challenges. It has imposed significant costs on the state budget, businesses, and citizens, while discouraging investment and undermining the rule of law. The elimination of corruption was a key demand of both the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan and remains a central expectation among Ukrainians associated with EU integration (Kychak, 2025).

Corruption remains one of the significant problems for foreign and domestic businesses, eventually leading to negative economic consequences, increasing inequality and slowing household income growth. According to the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index in 2023, Ukraine ranked 104th out of 180 countries with a score of 36, where 100 is very clean and zero is very corrupt. In contrast, in 2019, Ukraine ranked 126th with a score of 30 (100 is the best). This puts Ukraine on par with Serbia (36), ahead of Turkey (34) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (34), and just one point behind Albania (37) (Transparency International, 2024). While corruption remains high and there is room for further reform, it is clear that Ukraine is making progress in its transformation despite the ongoing war.

Several reforms are being implemented to fight corruption as part of EU integration. Between 2014 and 2019, Ukraine established a comprehensive system of anti-corruption institutions, including the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU), the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO), the High Anti-Corruption Court (HACC), the National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption (NACP), and the Asset Recovery and Management Agency (ARMA) (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, 2019). The country introduced key anti-corruption measures such as electronic asset declarations, the public e-procurement system Prozorro, and the public property transactions platform Prozorro.Sale. Government registers were made accessible, a whistleblower protection programme established, and a central web portal for managing public funds launched. In 2021, the NACP introduced the POLITDATA Register of Political Parties' Reports, enhancing transparency in political financing, and amendments to the Law on Prevention of Corruption created a unified whistleblower reporting portal, officially launched in September 2023 (Demchuk et al., 2024).

Ukraine has rapidly advanced its digital transformation, complementing traditional anti-corruption measures with technology-based solutions. In 2019, the Diia portal was developed and launched in 2020, initially offering 27 public services online; it now provides 72 services and 15 digital documents, including certificates for internally displaced persons. A 2021 law

recognised electronic passports in Diia as equivalent to paper documents, making Ukraine the first country to do so, and the same year it ranked first in Europe for open data development. During the early stages of the full-scale invasion, most state registers and databases were temporarily closed for security reasons but are now accessible under restrictions (Demchuk et al., 2024). These digital tools have significant potential to enhance transparency and reduce corruption (Kychak, 2025).

Following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, Ukraine's anti-corruption reforms encountered serious obstacles, as institutional capacity was disrupted and resources were redirected to the war effort. The introduction of martial law temporarily curtailed certain procedures; for instance, the mandatory submission and verification of asset declarations by public officials did not resume until September 2023, and even then with notable limitations. Nevertheless, the granting of EU candidate status in June 2022 renewed momentum for reform. The Ukrainian Parliament adopted the Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2021–2025, while the National Agency on Corruption Prevention began drafting the State Anti-Corruption Programme, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers in March 2023. In response to European Commission requirements, leadership vacancies in four of the five anti-corruption bodies were also filled through competitive selection procedures (Demchuk et al., 2024).

Another major anti-corruption effort in Ukraine involves legislative reform, primarily through the codification of numerous regulations. On 13 December, the Verkhovna Rada adopted the law “On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine to Clarify Provisions on Competitive Selection of Candidates for the Position of a Judge of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine”; however, the re-establishment of the Constitutional Court remains ongoing (Demchuk et al., 2024). The 2021 Law on the Prevention of Threats to National Security Related to the Excessive Influence of Persons with Significant Economic and Political Weight in Public Life sought to limit oligarchic influence in politics and separate big business from political processes, earning positive feedback from the EU. A Presidential Decree in June 2022 established regulations for creating a register of individuals with

significant economic and political influence (Razumkov Centre, 2022). Nevertheless, the Venice Commission criticised the law, arguing that it does not effectively tackle oligarchic influence and requires substantial institutional reforms, particularly in the Anti-Monopoly Committee and the National Bank (Demchuk et al., 2024).

On 6 September 2022, Ukraine adopted a law to align its anti-money laundering legislation with FATF standards, aiming to improve legal entities' reporting of ultimate beneficial owners and ownership structures. This will enhance financial monitoring and help to meet Ukraine's international obligations. A separate law was adopted in November 2022 to further align Ukrainian legislation with FATF standards and EU directives. Ukraine has also started the process of joining the OECD's Working Group on Combating Bribery in International Commercial Transactions (Razumkov Centre, 2022; Kychak, 2025).

In addition to anti-corruption reforms,, on 13 December 2022, Ukraine also adopted the "On The Media" law, developed by a working group of lawyers, media regulators, international experts and media business representatives. The law covers the entire national media system, including print, television, radio, online media, digital platforms and social media. It provides measures to counter aggressor countries' information influence, protect the national linguistic and cultural space and safeguard freedom of expression. The law is in line with EU standards, reduces private influence over the media, strengthens media independence and expands the capabilities of the regulatory authority. Overall, it is a significant step towards fulfilling the European Commission's recommendations (Razumkov Centre, 2022).

Adopting the new law "On National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine" on 13 December was also crucial in advancing Ukraine's European integration goals. Previously, Ukraine had been operating under the outdated "On National Minorities" law of June 1992. The new law outlines the State's approach to the protection of the rights and freedoms of national minorities, defines the role of the executive in the implementation of relevant policies and regulates the activities of public associations of national minorities. It guarantees national minorities the right to self-identification, freedom of

expression, conscience and religion, participation in political, economic and social life, and the preservation of cultural identity (Razumkov Centre, 2022).

Hence, by 2025, Ukraine had implemented most of the EC's recommendations for starting EU accession negotiations. These included appointing heads of key anti-corruption bodies, setting up a new High Judicial Council and High Qualification Commission for Judges, introducing measures to combat money laundering and updating laws on national minorities and the media.

Civil society, independent media and grassroots movements constitute a crucial component of Ukraine's reform process. Ukrainian society has demonstrated sustained political engagement, particularly with regard to corruption and governance. This was reflected in the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity, both of which articulated demands for systemic reform and the dismantling of entrenched corrupt practices. Progress in the field of anti-corruption has therefore been closely linked to continuous civic oversight and public pressure. The 2025 corruption scandal concerning Bill No. 12414 further illustrates the significance of civic accountability. The draft legislation envisaged placing the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO) under the authority of the Prosecutor General, thereby limiting their institutional independence. Although the proposal was justified by the executive as a protective measure against potential external interference, its rapid amendment and adoption by the Verkhovna Rada prompted public protests in several cities. Concerns centred on the risk of political interference and the weakening of safeguards against high-level corruption. Civic actors mobilised in response, organising demonstrations, engaging institutional stakeholders and advocating legislative revision. This resulted in the submission and adoption of a corrective draft law (No. 13533), which restored the procedural autonomy and competencies of NABU and SAPO. The episode underscores the continuing salience of corruption as a societal concern and highlights the capacity of civil society to influence institutional outcomes, even under conditions of wartime constraints. It further

demonstrates that public scrutiny remains a decisive factor in advancing reforms linked to Ukraine's European integration trajectory (Kychak, 2025).

To sum up the chapter, the Russian attack completely changed the attitude of Ukrainians towards Russia and led to the development of a new paradigm of Ukrainian identity. After the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, Ukrainians are more united than ever in their views on the direction of the country's foreign policy and economic development. With the beginning of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, any economic relations between the countries were impossible, and it was in the country's economic interest to deepen integration with the EU. This consolidated Ukrainian society and political elites regarding European integration of the country.

Moreover, the Russian invasion in 2022 marks a significant change in EU policy towards Ukraine. The EU response to Russian aggression was radically different in 2014 and 2022. The EU response in 2022 was much tougher and included providing Ukraine with economic, military, humanitarian and emergency assistance. The European Union also took a historic step by introducing the Temporary Protection Directive for the first time. In 2022, Ukraine became a candidate country for EU membership, significantly accelerating Ukraine's European integration processes. Today, the implementation of the European Commission's recommendations is Ukraine's main national priority, supported by both society and the political elite, and therefore, Ukraine continues to implement the European Commission's recommendations for EU accession. Furthermore, Ukrainian society maintains close scrutiny of the reform process and holds political elites accountable for progress in meeting the requirements of European integration.

CONCLUSION

Ukraine's European integration constitutes a unique case study, as it marks the first instance in the history of the European Union in which a state at war has been granted candidate status and is actively pursuing accession. A defining feature of Ukraine's integration process is the central role of the public in consolidating the country's choice of European integration. As this thesis argues, from the perspective of Liberal Intergovernmentalism, the choice of European integration was not self-evident, whether considered in economic, political or humanitarian terms, particularly in the context of ongoing war. The analysis, therefore, emphasises the decisive role of Ukrainian society in shaping and sustaining this strategic political direction.

The 2004 Orange Revolution placed European integration firmly on Ukraine's foreign policy agenda, while the 2014 Revolution of Dignity entrenched it as the country's strategic direction. Public opinion was central to both revolutions. In 2004, the primary demand concerned free and fair elections, yet closer alignment with Europe emerged as a significant objective. By contrast, Russia's reaction to Euromaidan profoundly transformed societal attitudes, including among many Russian-speaking citizens, reinforcing support for European integration and fostering a more consolidated national identity. Since 2014, and especially following the 2022 invasion, consensus among society on Ukraine's foreign policy and economic orientation has grown substantially stronger.

Therefore, to answer the main research question, the dissertation concludes that *Liberal Intergovernmentalism alone cannot fully explain Ukraine's European integration*. The thesis argues that, although Liberal Intergovernmentalism provides valuable insights into Ukraine's European integration process, its explanatory power is constrained. The three-stage causal mechanism identified by the theory, national preference formation, intergovernmental bargaining and institutional choice, can be observed in the case of Ukraine and offers a coherent account of these dynamics. Liberal Intergovernmentalism is beneficial for analysing Ukraine's European integration processes during the Orange Revolution, Euromaidan and following the Russian full-scale invasion of 2022. In particular, Liberal

Intergovernmentalism can account for the negotiation process between Ukraine and Russia after the Orange Revolution and explain Yushchenko's 'balanced' foreign policy approach. It also comprehensively accounts for the Yanukovych government's negotiations with the EU and Russia before the Vilnius Summit, during which it was expected to sign the Association Agreement. LI provides a convincing explanation of the institutionalisation of EU-Ukraine relations after Euromaidan, particularly about the AA and the DCFTA. LI is especially instrumental in explaining the EU integration of Ukraine following the 2022 Russian invasion. It explains the consolidation between society and political elites regarding national preferences for further European integration. Since the beginning of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, economic relations between the countries have been impossible, and it has been in the country's economic interests to deepen integration with the EU. Therefore, consolidating society and political elites is natural and necessary regarding the state's security and economic priorities. LI can also account for the negotiations between Ukraine and the EU on granting Ukraine candidate status and the consequent negotiations on possible membership.

However, the LI encounters limitations in accounting for the underlying motivations behind Ukraine's commitment to EU integration following the Euromaidan Revolution. It does not fully capture the role of identity politics in shaping integration preferences. Liberal Intergovernmentalism assumes that states primarily pursue economic interests in international relations. Accordingly, it would have been more beneficial for Ukraine, economically and in terms of security, to adopt an Eurasian foreign policy, since Russia was Ukraine's largest trading partner and Ukraine was almost entirely dependent on Russian gas. After the Orange Revolution, Ukraine suffered significant economic losses as a result of gas wars with Russia and a massive increase in gas prices for Ukraine as a result. After the 2014 revolution, Ukraine suffered significant security losses due to the cession of territory. Ukraine also experienced significant economic losses. The country lost its largest trading partner and was forced to urgently seek new partners. However, despite these risks, both the state and, more importantly, society pursued European integration, a trajectory that does not fully align with the core assumptions of Liberal Intergovernmentalism. Although Yanukovych's decision to reject the

Association Agreement in favour of closer relations with Russia is consistent with LI's theoretical assumptions, the subsequent mobilisation of Ukrainian society, through mass protest and revolution, challenged this logic by demanding a European-oriented path of development. For Ukrainians, integration with Russia meant authoritarianism, corruption, and oligarchic power. In 2004, Ukrainians made it clear that they wanted a democratic future for their country.

Hence, for the reasons outlined above, and given the central role of identity politics in shaping Ukraine's decision to pursue integration, this thesis argues that the application of Post-functionalism is essential for analysing its influence on social dynamics and the formation of public opinion. Moreover, the preferences of key domestic actors, particularly society and political elites, have significantly shaped the integration process, with their interdependence most clearly demonstrated during the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan Revolution. The thesis argues that the majority of the Ukrainian population supported European integration because the prospect of integration was perceived as a means to increase Ukraine's economic well-being, establish democratic institutions, and, at the same time, preserve the country's national identity. On the other hand, the prospect of Eurasian integration was perceived as a potential threat to Ukrainian national identity, as it would establish even closer ties with Russia and deepen Ukraine's economic dependence on Russia. This is in line with Post-functionalism, which suggests that individuals with a strong national identity are often sceptical of integration when it becomes clear that loyalty to their country and its institutions conflicts with integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p.13). Thus, the dissertation argues that applying Post-functionalism is needed to fully understand Ukraine's decision to pursue European integration, given the significant role of identity politics in shaping national preferences. The incorporation of Post-functionalism is necessary to provide a more comprehensive analysis, as it enables consideration of social dynamics, public opinion and broader cultural factors underpinning Ukraine's integration choices.

Furthermore, the thesis argues that Post-functionalism is valuable for understanding the EU's policy shift towards Ukraine following Russia's 2022 aggression. The EU's response to Russian aggression radically differed in 2014 and 2022. While LI offers a solid explanation for the EU's sanctions policy in 2014, the thesis claims that Post-functionalism provides a more convincing account of the differences in the EU's response to the wars in 2014 and 2022. In 2014, the conflict seemed distant and uncertain, surrounded by many open questions and doubts. It was highly politicised, making the adoption of sanctions difficult. By 2022, however, Russia's invasion was not only a blatant act of aggression but also a direct threat to European security. This shift in perception helped depoliticise sanctions and other previously contentious issues, enabling swift decision-making. Moreover, this shift can be seen through the lens of identity politics. In 2014, the annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine were perceived as distant events, often framed as an internal Ukrainian conflict and not explicitly referred to as a war. As a result, many Europeans felt detached from the issue. In 2022, when the war reached the EU's borders, the situation became much more immediate and personal, prompting a quicker and more unified response. Regarding the rapid implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive, Post-functionalism sees the refugee debate as a conflict between competing European and national identities rather than one driven by economic or political concerns. Solidarity with displaced Ukrainians highlights the politicised and often discriminatory nature of refugee protection. The debate around refugees and migrants is primarily about cultural distinctions between 'us' and 'them', with different visions of Europe at its core rather than national priorities. Hence, arguments that Ukraine belongs to the European family and the need for EU unity were central to the agreement on the Temporary Protection Regulation.

For the reasons outlined above, the first hypothesis — that the causal mechanisms proposed by Liberal Intergovernmentalism can fully account for the Ukrainian case — is rejected. Although Liberal Intergovernmentalism explains key aspects of preference formation and interstate bargaining, it does not adequately capture the role of identity politics in Ukraine's integration trajectory. To capture this dimension, the thesis suggests incorporating Post-functionalism into the analytical framework.

By contrast, the second hypothesis is confirmed. In the Ukrainian context, identity politics and party rhetoric have played a significant role in shaping public opinion, a pattern particularly evident during electoral campaigns and in the periods surrounding the Orange and Euromaidan Revolutions. For decades, Ukrainian politicians have exploited the East–West divide and language issues to mobilise regional support, often coupling these themes with promises of closer alignment with either Russia or the West. In practice, however, such campaign rhetoric frequently gave way to more cautious and balanced policies once in office. The language question became a major source of political mobilisation and contributed significantly to both the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity in 2013. At the same time, society has exerted direct influence on political elites, most notably during the Euromaidan protests, which led to the removal of President Yanukovych following his refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the EU. These developments demonstrate the interdependence of elite and societal preferences, particularly during elections and periods of political upheaval. Overall, the influence of domestic actors, especially society, has been decisive in shaping Ukraine’s European integration trajectory.

Despite the ongoing war, Ukraine has intensified its integration with the European Union, with reform efforts primarily concentrated on institutional alignment. By 2026, Ukraine had met most of the European Commission’s requirements to open accession negotiations, including key reforms in anti-corruption institutions, judicial governance, anti-money laundering, and legislation on minorities and the media. The corruption scandal of 2025 further highlighted the central role of society not only in advancing European integration but also in monitoring compliance with EU requirements. Sustaining progress requires the active involvement of citizens and businesses, supported by continued administrative reforms aimed at enhancing transparency, accountability, professional standards and access to public institutions. Strengthening civic awareness, improving access to information and encouraging public oversight remain essential to maintaining reform momentum. Broad societal engagement will ultimately be decisive in accelerating and consolidating Ukraine’s EU integration process.

Accordingly, the thesis proposes the following policy recommendations to support and advance Ukraine's European integration:

- Ukraine should continue strengthening the independence and capacity of key institutions, including those responsible for the judiciary, rule of law, anti-corruption, and other areas required by EU accession criteria. Sustained institutional consolidation across these sectors is essential not only for fulfilling EU requirements but also for maintaining domestic and international credibility.
- Given the decisive role of identity politics and public opinion, authorities should pursue inclusive nation-building policies that avoid exacerbating regional or linguistic divisions and consistently communicate reform objectives and EU integration goals to preserve societal consensus.
- Civic engagement should be actively encouraged through enhanced civil society oversight, improved access to public information, participatory governance, robust whistleblower protections, and greater public awareness of civic rights, all of which are essential for reinforcing accountability and accelerating reforms.
- Finally, EU institutions should maintain clear accession benchmarks and provide credible incentives, ensuring sustained political commitment that anchors domestic reforms, supports ongoing progress, and reduces the risk of reform fatigue.

The thesis acknowledges several limitations. First, the reliance on Liberal Intergovernmentalism and Post-functionalism may not fully capture alternative explanatory perspectives, such as neo-functionalism, constructivism or geopolitically oriented approaches. Second, as Ukraine's European integration remains an ongoing process, particularly in the context of war, the conclusions are necessarily provisional; future political or military developments may significantly reshape its trajectory. The exceptional circumstances of full-scale war further limit the generalisability of the findings to other enlargement cases. Finally, the analysis is based primarily on secondary sources and publicly available data, which may constrain

empirical depth. Moreover, public opinion polling conducted under wartime conditions may be influenced by emotional mobilisation, social desirability bias and restricted access to certain territories.

Future research could broaden this analysis by incorporating additional theoretical perspectives to provide a more comprehensive account of Ukraine's European integration. Furthermore, as the present study focuses primarily on the Ukrainian domestic dimension, subsequent research could expand the scope to include the EU perspective, particularly the preferences and strategic calculations of key member states and EU institutions. Empirical depth could also be enhanced through the inclusion of elite and expert interviews, systematic content analysis of parliamentary debates, and survey-based research examining attitudes towards EU integration. A post-war reassessment will be necessary to evaluate whether wartime unity persists and whether identity consolidation remains stable over time. Finally, a comparative analysis with other enlargement cases would strengthen the generalisability of the findings and allow for a more robust assessment of the long-term institutional implementation of EU reforms.

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