

# THE EU ASPECT AT THE UKRAINIAN MAIDAN

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**Abstract:** *An alarming decision “to pause” the process of Ukrainian Eurointegration taken by the previous government of Ukraine, turned out to be highly disturbing, both to the Ukrainian people and the EU in terms of planned partnership. Following the country’s course change a series of dramatic events unraveled triggering a mass protest movement called Euromaidan across major part of Ukraine, indicating the position of Ukrainian society towards the events. The further unfolding of the events in the Ukraine starting from November 22, 2013 diminished the “euro” direction making it solemnly “MAIDAN”. The direction of Eurointegration in Ukraine’s foreign policy was no longer the priority of the rebel movement, shifting the focus of those protesting to the internal issues. During the Maidan the EU’s representatives initiated and participated in the negotiation process between the government and the opposition, thus demonstrating support to Ukraine on its way to democracy. In the meantime, Maidan expected stricter sanctions towards representatives of the state at that time: freezing of the accounts of those associated with corruption as well as their visa bans and restrictions for travel and business conduction in the EU, etc.. The EU’s lasting conservative behavior was regarded negatively by protesters and lead to disappointment.*

**Keywords:** Eastern Partnership; EU; Euromaidan; Maidan; revolution; soft power; Ukraine

## INTRODUCTION

The region of the Eastern Europe is becoming increasingly important to the European Union in terms of its safety, economy and multi-level cooperation. After the EU’s “great expansion” in 2004 followed by Bulgaria’s and Romania’s acceptance to the Union in 2007, the renewed eastern borders became of vital importance. The European Neighborhood Policy introduced in 2004 and the Eastern Partnership program established in 2009 are implementing EU’s “soft power” to its regional neighbors. The Eastern Partnership Summit held in November 2013 in Vilnius demonstrated that this “soft power” instrument is a universal tool for the regions of Eastern Europe and Southern Caucasus, but its equal effectiveness is questionable. The Vilnius Summit showed positive feedback in terms of the EU’s power only in two out of six member-states of the Eastern Partnership. During the summit Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia were to sign the Association Agreement with the EU. Unexpectedly, despite the promises of the

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Ukrainian government to both the EU and the population of Ukraine, the initiation process was brought to halt. Moldova and Georgia proceeded with the Agreement initialling. Thus, the “soft power” tool did not seem to be working in this case. It was particularly good environment to test other allegedly pro-European countries, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus. Armenia had already seemed to prefer pro-Russian Customs Union despite an initial interest in the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) a part of AA; Azerbaijan opted low-level cooperation with the EU, mostly in the energy sector; the support of the EaP by Belarus is always questionable due to A. Lukashenko’s political regime and his tight ties with Russia.

## 1. EU’S SOFT POWER IN THE EASTERN EUROPE AND SOUTHERN CAUCAUS

The concept of the Soft Power is getting progressively popular in the fast globalizing world. First introduced by Joseph S. Nye in his work *Bound to Lead* (Nye, 1990), it was later developed in several other books and articles, including *Soft Power: the Means to Success in World Politics* (Nye, 2004) and *The Future of Power* (Nye, 2010). According to J. Nye, Soft Power is the ability to affect other countries or regions through the common means of framing the agenda, persuading and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcome. The types of resources associated with it include intangible factors such as institutions, ideas, values, culture and the perceived legitimacy of policies (Nye, 2012, p.37).

The author is convinced that the resources often associated with the Hard Power behavior can as well produce Soft Power behavior depending on the context and its use (Nye, 2012, p.37). Nye defines power as an actor’s ability to act in a social situation, so as to influence others in order to get the targeted results. “Hard and soft power are related because they are both aspects of the ability to achieve one’s purpose by affecting the behaviour of others. The distinction between them is of same degree, both in the nature of the behaviour and the tangibility of the resources” (Nye, 2004, p.7). The Smart Power in comparison to the Soft and Hard powers is considerably more efficient in terms of Foreign and Domestic Affairs. For example, the EU’s successful economic performance can produce both the hard-power of sanctions with restricted market access and the soft-power of attraction and emulation of success. Soft Power relies on positive attraction, framing of an agenda-setting and on persuasion which is the use of argument to influence the beliefs and actions of others without the threat of force or promise of payment (Delcour L., Tulmets E., 2009, p. 509).

The Soft Power approach to the EU has become popular among political scientists, and has been eagerly adopted by the EU and member-states officials. For instance, Eneko Landaburu, at the time the Commission’s Director General for Enlargement, argued that the expansion and the ENP are descriptive examples of “soft power Europe” (Landaburu, 2006).

Nowadays, the solemn application of only one of the mentioned powers is not sustainable for modern international affairs. The tendency is leaning towards

the “Smart power” – a power that refers to the strategies that link resources and goals: in order to achieve the goals, an actor must effectively combine hard and soft power resources in changing social circumstances (Nye, 2010, p.14). International exchanges that imply economic payments contain hard power component and require adequate combination of strategies, meaning wielding smart power. From this perspective, the European Union is involved not only in military, but also in non-military exchanges that involve coercion, and needs intelligent strategies to combine coercion and attraction (Dîrdalâ, L., 2013). That’s why the EU is reviewing its policies towards the Eastern neighborhood hoping that Smart power application will promote new methods that will help to reshape the vision of post-Soviet sector modernization.

## **2. THE EU – UKRAINE RELATIONSHIP AT THE SCOPE OF EASTERN PARTNERSHIP**

Despite the official support of Ukraine, as well as other five states, in the initiated Eastern Partnership project of the EU in 2009, the cooperation between the two dates further back and is of strategic importance to the EU. The latter started seeking new approaches in soft power influence on its Eastern neighbors.

The resolution of the main foreign policy direction of Ukraine dates back to 1993 and is the first official document that proclaims European direction of the Ukrainian foreign policy. An abstract - “... the ultimate purpose of the foreign policy is a membership of Ukraine in European Communities... to maintain stable relations with the European Communities, Ukraine will sign the Agreement on partnership and Cooperation with European Communities. The implementation of this agreement will be the first step towards an associate, and then to the full membership in the organization” (Постанова Верховної Ради України Про основні напрямки зовнішньої політики України. – 1993). An Agreement on partnership and Cooperation with European Communities was signed in 1994 and defined the spheres of cooperation between the EU and Ukraine. Four years later, in 1998, the Strategy of Ukraine's integration into Europe was adopted by the presidential decree, Eurointegration of Ukraine was proclaimed as a strategic goal in the state program of 2000.

In 2004, Ukraine was included in European Neighborhood Policy and signed the Action Plan that coordinated the relationship between both sides. In 2007, Ukraine began negotiations concerning the Association Agreement that proclaimed the new level in relationship between the EU and Ukraine. In 2009, the EU suggested the new framework of the relationship by initiating the Eastern Partnership program. At that time, Ukraine had the closest ties with the EU comparing to six other partner-states as well as promoter of the Association Agreement adoption before the implementation of EaP. The official signature of the Association Agreement was a step in the EaP program, only Ukraine was in favor of such scenario, even though, there was no unanimity concerning its overall advancement for the country. Some were convinced that the new initiative would

hamper the dynamics of bilateral EU-Ukraine relations. Ukraine was clearly the leader of EaP among six other participant states at the moment of EaP initiation.

Ukraine was the first to paraphrase the Association Agreement and on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 2012 the EU Foreign Affairs Council adopted the Council Conclusions on Ukraine. The next important step ahead for Ukraine was signing the Association Agreement with the EU planned to be accomplished at the Summit of the Eastern Partnership in Vilnius in November 2013.

## 2.1. The EU Aspect on Ukrainian Maidan

On November 21, 2013, a week before Vilnius Summit, the Ukrainian government has decided “to take a pause” in the process of the Association Agreement adoption. The statement of the Ukrainian Prime-Minister M. Azarov triggered an immediate internal and international reaction.

Ukraine has surprised the world - the U-turn was unexpected for everyone as well as lacking any reasonable explanation. Such significant event was reflected on a divided society of Ukraine – approximately half was supporting European course, while the other half was against it. In no time, the main squares of the cities started filling with activists protesting against the Cabinet of Ministers and its leader Mr. Azarov and their unpredicted change of country’s course. It is where “the movement” got its name – for Europe on Maidan – Euromaidan. “Ukraine is Europe”, “We want to live in EU”, “Youth chooses the EU”, “EU deserves the EU” – are some of the top slogans of the movement.

As Mr. Azarov said a week before the Vilnius Summit, the Association Agreement with the EU was not signed, thus meaning that no demands of protesters were met. Some say that the Ukrainian officials did not believe in long lasting prospective of the protests, but only after a week those in power lost their patience. On November the 30<sup>th</sup>, a special riot police division “Berkut”, received an order to brutally beat and disperse those peacefully protesting on the Maidan Square in Kyiv, hoping that this will bring riots to an end. Having revealed its real face, the regime shifted the focus of the protesters from the European prospective of Ukraine onto itself. That is when people started demanding president’s resignation and punishment for those allegedly participating in beatings of protesters.

The Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (DIF) and the Kiev International Institute of Sociology conducted a poll asking to name three main reasons why people would go to Maidan. The poll resulted in 70% answering that the police brutality during peaceful protests was the reason motivating people to take to streets, 53.5% named the denial by V. Yanukovich to sign the Association Agreement as one of the reasons, 50% thought that the desire to change the life for better was motivating people, 39% wanted government’s resignation, and only 5% were inspired by oppositions calls (Неймырок Д.). The poll was conducted 7-8 of December in 2013 and comprised of 1037 respondents.

The EU could not stand aside of the situation in Ukraine and had to react. The European Parliament demanded the EU to support the eastern partners seeking

closer ties. The session in Strasbourg passed a resolution condemning the “brutal use of force against peaceful demonstrations,” demanding the immediate release of detained protesters, and calling for top-level EU engagement with Kyiv.

Even though Maidan was backed up by the support of the EU it was not fully supported by the people of Ukraine’s regions, at least not evenly. The next poll took place on November 20<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> showing the variability of protest supporting in different parts of the country: in the West 80% of respondents supported the Maidan, while South showed weak 20% support with 71% against the demonstrations (Половина українців підтримують Євромайдан – соціологи).

Even though the internal support for demonstrations was not evenly distributed throughout the country, the unanimity in international condemnation of actions of government could not be higher. During this time various governments, especially of those in the EU, were closely monitoring the events in Ukraine. EU’s leaders visited Ukraine with the words of support for democratic changes making statements regarding the current situation in Ukraine. “I hope that it is a mirror for the Western European family members seeing how important is the European Union and Ukrainian would turn back believe in it”.—Minister of Foreign Affairs Radoslav Sikorskii said on the one of his interviews (Євромайдан поверне Європі віру в ЄС) Meaning that not only the EU aspect was present on Maidan, but also that some European politicians could find a positive influence in terms of strengthening the EU’s domestic situation.

During the long-lasting Maidan protests the EU refrained from imposing sanctions, preferring to build a constructive dialog to reach a compromise. Soon, such actions proved to be ineffective and resulted in Ukrainian society’s disappointment.

Another poll was held on the third of February suggesting that the repressive measures taken by the government have radicalized Maidan protesters significantly. 88% of those standing on the main square of the country were men; 63% were opposed to any negotiations with top officials, in comparison, only a month and a half ago their number was at 47% (Майдан став радикальнішим – соціологи). Such prospective was promising with deepening of the crisis and greater radicalization every day. At this point, it was clear, that without the intervention of a third party, the crisis in Ukraine would escalate and become even more dangerous. The EU began its participation in the negotiations between V. Yanukovych and opposition leaders. Before going to the round table with opposition leaders, the foreign affairs ministers of France, Poland and Germany conducted discussions with Mr. Yanukovych on a “roadmap towards a political solution” (EU imposes Ukraine sanctions after deadly Kiev clashes).

On February 21, the president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, and three opposition leaders have signed an agreement to end the crisis that sparked bloody clashes between protesters and riot police on the streets of the capital.

The deal sets out plans to hold early presidential elections, form a national unity government and revert to the 2004 constitution, removing some of the president's powers. The deal was also signed by two European Union foreign ministers who helped broker it in tortuous negotiations that lasted more than 30

hours. “This agreement is not the end of the process. Its the beginning of the process,” the German foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, said after the signing. He said it was not perfect but the best agreement that could have been reached. “With it Ukraine has an opportunity to resume its way to Europe,” he said (Ukraine opposition leaders sign deal with government). Parliament subsequently began to vote to make the agreement law, supporting immediately a return to the constitution of 2004 and an unconditional amnesty for people detained in the unrest. It also voted to allow the release of the former prime minister Y.Tymoshenko after more than two years in prison.

European leaders said that this agreement has a number of challenges in it, at the same time, European ministers who participated in the negotiations said that the signed compromise deal is a chance to exit the crisis.

Additionally, the EU has agreed to impose sanctions on the Ukrainian officials “responsible for violence and use of excessive force” after the bloodiest day of clashes in Kiev. In the statement EU’s foreign ministers talked about targeted sanctions including asset freezes and visa bans.

However the signed deal between V. Yanukovich and the opposition was not carried out. “Maidan’s voice” was criticizing loudly enough the compromise deal and was deeply unsatisfied with it, promising to take more radical measures, urging Mr.Yanukovich’s escape to Russia.

After the escalation of the Crimean crisis, the negotiations between the EU and Ukraine were renewed. Five days after the so-called referendum was held in Crimea, the political part of the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine was signed promising to implement the economic part of the Association Agreement until the end of this year.

## CONCLUSION

The EU’s foreign policy of the Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus is actively applying its soft power in the Eastern Partnership project. Ukraine being one of its member-states is under the EU’s soft power influence, at the same time, it was evident that this soft power did not prove to do any good in the deployment of the Ukrainian crisis and would be more effective in combination with the Smart Power.

During the entire period of the Maidan in Ukraine, the aspect of EU’s power is of various significance. The protests in Ukraine that started after sudden “pause” in the eurointegration process were based on the European future of Ukraine. The Euromaidan itself was not lasting so long (only the first week of the protests), and was not so numerous in comparison to the following protests. It turned to be a spark that lit an enormous fire the wounds of which are still healing on the body of the Ukrainian society. The poll held after the dramatic and cruel night beatings on the first of December 2013 showed that the aims of the protesters shifted from supporting eurointegration direction in foreign policy of Ukraine to removal of the current government. At the beginning of protests the EU had a high level of credibility among the Ukrainian population believing that the European

organizations will show support in their fight for democracy, but it turned to have let them down. A certain level of credibility was restored after the Association Agreement was signed with the new Ukrainian government.

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