

# **Overcoming geopolitical insecurity. Making the case for a neutral Ukraine according to the Austrian model<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> The paper build upon initial research by Heinz Gärtner. See: Gärtner, H. (2014). Neutrality for Ukraine according to the Austrian Model. (Policy Paper / Österreichisches Institut für Internationale Politik, 1). Wien: Österreichisches Institut für Internationale Politik (oiip), and Gärtner, Heinz (2014) Neutrality as a Model for the New Eastern Europe? Johns Hopkins University SAIS

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## Introduction

The crisis in Ukraine has thrown the Russia-West contest over the future orientation of Ukraine and the country's vulnerability to external pressure into sharp relief. The case illustrates how the failure to create a *shared* or *common neighbourhood*—that is, a cooperative zone—turned the post-Soviet region into a battleground of mutually exclusive visions. Having simmered beneath the surface for decades, tensions between Russia and the West came to a head once the geopolitical balance on Europe's Eastern frontier seemed to tilt irreversibly Westwards with the envisioned signing of the EU association agreement by Ukraine in 2013.

The outbreak of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine revealed what the West has underestimated, ignored, or deliberately suppressed, namely that geography matters. Ukraine, the name of which originates from the Slavic word for *borderland* (Magocsi 2010, 189), is located in a geographic hot spot. Of all *in-between states*, it has greatest geostrategic importance to both Russia and the West (Hyde-Price 2007). Its geographical position has made Ukraine susceptible to the power struggle for spheres of influence between Russia and competing powers for more than 400 years (Graham 2017).

For Russia, Ukraine symbolises the last stronghold against an institutionally continuously expanding West. Similarly, the West's intention to bring Ukraine into its orbit was motivated by its aim to constrain Russia's influence in the region. This contest has trapped Ukraine in a kind of "geopolitical dilemma" (Tchakarova 2017), which has made it difficult for the country to develop a strategic foreign policy ever since it gained independence.

This chapter argues that a Ukraine orientated exclusively towards one side will neither be more secure, nor will it enable progress beyond the current standoff in Russia-West relations. It suggests that Ukraine's adopting of a neutral status might be the most viable and sustainable way to achieve more security, stability, and prosperity over the long term. The enduring war in the east of the country calls for a broader solution that addresses fundamental problems are at the core of the crisis in European security.

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The argument for a neutral Ukraine is based on the logic that neutrality would remove the external pressure from Ukraine and enable the country to cultivate political, economic, and social ties with both Russia and the West that best suit Ukraine's needs. It would facilitate the uniting of a deeply divided society that disagrees over Ukraine's (geo)political orientation, and enable the building of a stronger national identity. In other words, neutrality would have a potentially stabilising effect in the volatile security environment that the country finds itself in, and pave the way towards a politically more stable and economically and socially improved future. The chapter suggests that Austria's history of neutrality, which is a proven success story, offers a number of valuable lessons for Ukraine and could serve as a guideline for Ukraine's own model of neutrality.

The argument that the Ukraine crisis made any rationale for Ukraine adopting permanent neutrality obsolete, and that only a NATO-security umbrella could guarantee Ukrainian security, does not hold. On the contrary, it is in fact the outbreak of the crisis that strengthens the argument for a neutral Ukraine. Despite some attention and support for the neutrality option in 2014, it soon disappeared from the public radar and has not been discussed since. In view of the lack of solid prospects for resolving the crisis in and around Ukraine, a policy-oriented debate on the matter involving academics and policymakers is today more urgent than ever.

### **Ukrainian foreign and security policy since 1991: Navigating between East and West**

Ukraine's search for a place between the East and West began as early as the country gained independence in 1991. The country's foreign and security policy before 2014, when Petro Poroshenko came to power following the Maidan revolution, can be best described as a pendulum oscillating between two extreme positions, steadily swinging between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community, without coming to rest at an equilibrium position.

This manoeuvring can be attributed to both internal and external factors. In large part, it is the result of divergent understandings of the national interest by Kiev's political communities, the struggles between conflicting business interests, and the self-serving behaviour of the ruling elites, which have often prioritised their own wellbeing over the national interest (Molchanov in Moroney et al. 2002, 227). This in turn is closely related to the necessity of having to choose between the mutually exclusive agendas of Russia and the West, which has placed considerable constraints on Ukraine's ability to develop a more balanced and strategic policy. Therefore, policies pursued by Kiev's political elites depended on relations with Moscow on the one hand, and Washington and Brussels on the other.

The division over the preferred orientation of Ukraine is also reflected in Ukrainian society. Historically linked to Poland and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, people living in the West of the country have been more closely bound to Central and Eastern Europe. The Eastern parts of the country, with a large Russian-speaking

minority, have had historically close economic and cultural ties with Russia. At the same time, the ethnolinguistic east-west divergence is only one line along which societal divisions run in Ukraine. Ukraine's split identity and attitudes run deep in both the east and west of the country. This is one of the reasons why there has never been a clear majority of the population in favour of either a pro-Western or a pro-Russian course. At the same time, over several decades up to 2013, a considerable portion of the population had been in favour of some arrangement with Russia. This however had been left out of the equation whenever the ruling elite in Kiev decided on a pro-Western course (Molchanov in Moroney et al. 2002, 228f). One such example is Leonid Kuchma, who embarked on a pro-Western course right after taking office, despite having won the 1994 presidential elections on the grounds of his pro-Russia stance (Kuzio 2006, 91). This policy orientation was maintained over the 1990s and beyond, despite its evident lack of **clear public support**. In this sense, representatives of the Ukrainian ruling elite, primarily guided by power interests and personal greed, acted as "free agents without any desire to design a policy compatible with public attitudes" (Cheng & Lee 2017, 11).

The option of not aligning with either side was subject to debate in Ukraine from the early days of the country. In fact, initially, at the time **when Ukraine became a sovereign state in 1990**, the country envisioned itself as neutral. Its Declaration of Sovereignty from **July 16, 1990** officially stated that Ukraine intended to become a permanent neutral state that would not participate in military blocs and adhere to the three nuclear principles of not possessing, producing, or acquiring nuclear weapons. The policy, however, had never been realised. Instead, the country has seen myriad changes in foreign policy course, leading to a kind of "political schizophrenia" (Simon 2009, 3). The reason for this is that Ukraine's neutrality was not based on international law. Therefore, it was able to be abandoned in 2014 by a domestic decision.

It was in the mid-1990s that the West's interest in Ukraine increased and found reciprocity in the policy of Leonid Kuchma, elected president in 1994. The first indication of Western attempts to draw Ukraine into its orbit was in February 1994, when NATO invited Ukraine as the first former Soviet republic to participate in its Partnership for Peace programme. Three years later, Ukraine and NATO signed the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership, which set the framework for a *special relationship*. Steps taken over the following years to enhance the cooperation included the opening of the NATO Information and Documentation Center in Kiev and the formation of a NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC), both in 1997. Furthermore, in the second half of the 1990s, of all CIS countries, Ukraine was the one to receive the largest amount of US aid. The evolving US interest in Ukraine reflects US acknowledgement of Ukraine's strategic importance as a buffer between Russia and Central-Eastern Europe and its aim to curb Russia's imperial ambitions in the CIS (Kuzio 2003, 22f). At the same time, the actual possibility of Ukraine joining the Alliance was not an issue for either side. For example, Ihor Kharchenko, Director of Policy Analysis and Planning in the Ukrainian Ministry of

Foreign Affairs, said in September 1997, "Ukraine has not chosen to seek NATO membership, at least for the time being".<sup>3</sup>

The back-and-forth manoeuvring in Ukraine's foreign and security policy course saw its culmination during the second term of Leonid Kuchma's presidency between 1999 and 2005. In 2002, President Kuchma publicly announced Ukraine's will to become a member of NATO. The aim to attain full-fledged NATO (and EU) membership was written into Ukraine's new military doctrine from June 2004. Only a month later however, Kiev's Westward policy saw a U-turn when the administration published a decree amending the doctrine by removing the goal of NATO (and EU) integration from it.

Ukraine's foreign policy saw yet another change with Viktor Yushchenko's accession to power in 2005 following the Orange Revolution. Committed to Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration, soon after taking office as president, Yushchenko announced the "end of multivectorism" (quoted in Kuzio 2006, 89), by which he referred to Kuchma's incoherent and ever-changing foreign policy direction. Yushchenko again amended the military doctrine by declaring Ukraine's desire to integrate into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions as the top priority of his country's foreign policy.

Yet, as throughout the previous decade, Ukraine's aspired path of integrating into Western security institutions neither had broad public support, nor was the vision shared by the Ukrainian ruling elite. The disagreement over the direction of foreign policy within Ukrainian political leadership became evident during the visit of then Prime Minister Yanukovich to NATO HQ in Brussels in 2006, where he announced that Ukraine's membership plans would be put on hold, without having consulted with the president, exposing sharp divisions within the Ukrainian ruling elite on the matter (Nygren 2008, 56).

The situation changed again when Yulia Tymoshenko became Prime Minister. With her and the Rada speaker Arseniy Yatsenyuk's support, in 2008, Yushchenko reiterated Ukraine's desire to pursue Euro-Atlantic security integration by submitting a request for a NATO Membership Action Plan, which would have officially opened Ukraine's path towards NATO accession. At the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008, however, due to the opposition of several European allies, including Germany, France and Italy, Kiev was not granted accession status.

The pendulum again swung away from the pro-Western aisle of Ukraine's foreign policy spectrum towards a more neutral stance when Viktor Yanukovich came to power in 2010. Upon inauguration, he announced that Ukraine would remain "non-aligned" as foreseen by Ukraine's 1990 Declaration of State Sovereignty and ruled out joining NATO. The statement saw its formal declaration with the removal of Ukraine's will to integrate into NATO from the law "On the Fundamentals of National Security of Ukraine."

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<sup>3</sup> Quote cited in Yaroslav Bilinsky, *Endgame in NATO's Enlargement: The Baltic States and Ukraine* (Westport CT, Greenwood Press 1999) 80-81. In Wolff in Moore 2017, 97.

Profoundly stronger pro-Western sentiments only began to take shape after Russia's interference following the Maidan revolution in 2013 and its support for the separatist movement in the east of the country. In December 2014, with a new government in power, the Ukrainian parliament adopted a decision to repeal its status of neutrality and nonalignment. In June 2017, President Petro Poroshenko signed the law "On Amendments to Some Laws of Ukraine on the Foreign Policy of Ukraine," which defines membership in NATO as one of Ukraine's national security priorities. The intention to seek integration into the Western security structure was formally reaffirmed in February 2019 when the majority of the Verkhovna Rada voted to declare Ukraine's membership in the EU and NATO as the country's strategic goal.

Volodymyr Zelensky's conciliatory tone, as opposed to his predecessor Poroshenko's nationalist rhetoric, did not translate into a more nuanced foreign policy. At the meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission in November 2019, Zelensky reaffirmed Ukraine's determination to continue cooperating with NATO and to join the Alliance in the future. Moreover, Ukraine's aspiration to join the EU and NATO remains enshrined into the country's constitution [since February 2019](#).

At the same time, within the Ukrainian population, the strong post-Maidan support for a pro-Western course is giving way to a more nuanced sentiment. According to a survey conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) in December 2019,<sup>4</sup> the majority of Ukrainians want their country to have good relations with both Russia and the West and do not want their country to join the military alliance of either Russia or the West. More than half of the population advocates a neutral status for the country. If this sentiment becomes stronger, it could translate into some flexibility on the part of the Ukrainian elite.

### **The continuing relevance of neutrality<sup>5</sup>**

Looking at the experiences of the two World Wars, the strategy of neutrality produced mixed results. Nevertheless, it was more successful than opponents of neutrality would admit. In the First World War, the neutrality of Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland proved advantageous. It was Germany's invasion of neutral Belgium, after all, that made Britain enter the war. During the Second World War, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland, and Spain managed to remain neutral. While it is true that Hitler ignored the neutral status of Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Luxembourg, and Yugoslavia, it was not only neutral states that were victims of Hitler's aggression: Poland and

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<sup>4</sup> The survey was conducted for the research project "The Geopolitical Orientations of People in Borderland States" led by John O'Loughlin. For a summary of the initial results see Gerard Toal, John O'Loughlin and Kristin M. Bakke. Is Ukraine caught between Europe and Russia? We asked Ukrainians this important question. The Washington Post, 26 February 2020

<sup>5</sup> See Gärtner and Höll. In Reiter and Gärtner (2001); and Gärtner (2018)

Czechoslovakia, conversely, experienced the failure of Britain and France's security guarantees.<sup>6</sup>

The argument that neutrality is a thing of the Cold War that has lost its meaning with the end of the East-West confrontation is only partly true historically. First, neutrality was not constitutive of the Cold War, but it was its anomaly. The Cold War was about building blocs; neutrality was about staying out of them. Neutrality in the East-West context was a very special form of neutrality that applied in full to only Austria and Finland. Second, neutrality existed long before the Cold War. For example, the Archbishop of Salzburg, Paris Lodron, pursued a policy of neutrality during the Thirty Years' War. Before the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, most of the small German states sought to remain neutral. Switzerland's neutrality harks back to 1815 and the idea itself goes back as far as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. After 1945, there was strong pressure on Switzerland to abandon its neutral status because it was believed that it had become meaningless; then the East-West conflict erupted.

Neutrality has proven time and again that it can adapt to new political environments. It will remain in place as a political principle of behaviour as long as there are conflicts. Terrance Hopmann reminds us that the neutral and non-aligned states of Europe heavily influenced the content of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 as the outcome of negotiations within the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).<sup>7</sup> Many states saw in the CSCE an opportunity to break down barriers between the two dominant alliance systems in Europe, NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organization, and to try to override Cold War divisions with a new normative structure to enhance security in a divided Europe. The most important features of any alliance are its mutual defence obligations. Neutrality and collective defence are negatively related. When the importance of collective defence obligations—which come into force in the case of an attack on a member state's territory—increases, neutrality would acquire a different meaning. The consequence for neutrality would not be to engage, but to stay out again. Conversely, when alliance obligations are no longer necessary, the status of neutrality is no longer in question. Neutrality means non-membership in an alliance based on political convention or on constitutional and international law.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Dan Reiter puts forward the argument that states make alliance policy in accordance with lessons drawn from formative historical experiences. He points to the various individual experiences of neutral states in the two world wars as decisive influences on each state's alliance preferences. Belgium, which was invaded in 1914, joined an alliance after the war. In contrast, the Netherlands and Switzerland, which emerged unscathed, reinforced their neutral orientations after the war. All three again attempted neutrality in World War II, and the two that were invaded, Belgium and the Netherlands, joined NATO after the war, while Switzerland remained neutral. Similarly, Denmark, Sweden and Norway remained neutral during and after World War I. Denmark and Norway, which were invaded by German troops in World War II, abandoned neutrality to join NATO after the war. Conversely, Sweden, which escaped involvement in the war, reinforced its commitment to neutrality after 1945. Finland, which experienced the failure of its alliance policy during the war, opted for neutrality. Despite exceptions (e.g. Belgium in the late 1930's) Reiter claims that only individual experiences successfully explain the variety of individual national decisions. Dan Reiter, *Crucible of Beliefs: Learning, Alliances, and World Wars* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Terrence Hopmann, "From Helsinki I to Helsinki II?: The Role of the Neutral and Nonaligned States in the OSCE," in Gärtner, *Ibid.*, pp. 143-160

<sup>8</sup> See also Gärtner, *op. cit.*

Neutrality proved relevant once again after the end of the Cold War in the new challenges of the changing international environment. Neutral states turned out to be well suited—and in many ways better suited than aligned states—to making a constructive contribution to the fight against the new post-Cold War threats, such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; terrorism, which potentially holds new dangerous dimensions in combination with proliferation; fragile and dysfunctional states, which can be breeding grounds for terrorism, a source of uncontrolled immigration, and a source for the development and dissemination of organised crime. Ever since, neutral states have contributed to reconstruction and humanitarian aid efforts in war-torn countries within the framework of the UN, the EU, the OSCE, or NATO partnerships. Furthermore, the possibility for participation in EU common foreign policy and in crisis management is explicitly permitted for neutral states. Neutral states are also part of programmes within the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP).

The added value of neutral states in contributing to peace and stability came to the fore once again more recently in the context of the Ukraine crisis and the sharpened tensions between Russia and the Western allies. It was in fact the neutral status of Switzerland and Austria and their mediating roles in managing the crisis in Ukraine within the framework of the OSCE that made the process acceptable to all OSCE states, which in turn allowed them to decidedly and act effectively.

### **From insecurity towards common European security; neutrality as a problem-solving model for Ukraine and beyond**

Neutrality has not only proven a successful instrument in the past, but it remains a sustainable concept today and for the future, including for the states *in-between*. In fact, the concept is a viable solution as long as no inclusive wider European security architecture encompassing Europe and Russia exists (Frank in Gärtner 2018).

The debate on neutrality as a possible concept for Ukraine gained new currency with the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis in 2014. Several international academics and policymakers discussed different options of neutrality as a model for Ukraine.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The most prominent advocates of the 'Finland option' for Ukraine in 2014 were former security advisor of U.S. President Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.<sup>9</sup> The analogy made by them draws upon Finland's long territorial border with Russia, its good relations with both the East and West and its military nonalignment. In Finland itself, the idea was not well received. Local policy makers and the general public did not support the idea pointing to the lack of analogy between Finland's experience and the Ukrainian case (Rainio-Niemi in Gärtner 2017: 15f). Another model for Ukraine, as this paper suggests, is Austrian neutrality. At the time of its suggestion (see Gärtner 2014), Austrian neutrality as a model for Ukraine was widely discussed in Austria and well-received by former and acting political figures from all corners of the political spectrum (Rainio Niemi in Gärtner 2017: 29f). Graham Allison (2014) went even further than most proponents by suggesting not only a militarily, but also a politically and economically neutral Ukraine. According to his vision, Ukraine (minus Crimea) would remain a sovereign, independent nonbloc state which for the next 25 years would neither become part of NATO or the EU, nor of any equivalent Russia-led institutions. All parties – including Ukraine – would have to formally agree to its neutrality status. In fact, Russia's acceptance is key to Ukraine's survival as an independent political entity,

Before 2014, the idea of neutrality as a possible future concept for Ukraine had not received much attention.<sup>10</sup> This is partly related to the fact that since the end of the Cold War, the concept of neutrality was not attributed much relevance in general. This reflects a broader conviction that neutrality is a thing of the Cold War—a phased-out model which could not adequately respond to the post-1989 reality of the international environment. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the breakup of the Warsaw Pact, the idea of neutrality and nonalignment as a potential alternative model for Eastern Europe was entirely overshadowed by NATO's determination to anchor the Eastern bloc in the Western hemisphere. Haunted by their recent history, the Central and Eastern European post-communist countries themselves also shared the belief that only institutional alignment with the West, rather than nonalignment, could guarantee their security. NATO's endeavour to expand further eastward persisted after the accession of the Visegrád Group (Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic) in 1999, and of the Vilnius Group (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia) in 2004. In the West, NATO's expansion was seen as a natural course of events and keeping the door open to new members was not widely questioned.

The Ukraine-neutrality discussion of 2014 was embedded into the broader debate on the European security architecture and the overall understanding that the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine brought to the fore the need to address unresolved questions regarding European security, which lie at the heart of the current Russia-West standoff and the crisis of the European security order. One such fundamental question is the future security status of states located between Russia and the West, including Ukraine. It became evident that further Western institutional expansion eastwards would make neither Ukraine nor other *states in-between*, nor the European continent as a whole, more secure.

It is our conviction too that instead of continuing Western enlargement, a solution is needed that acknowledges geopolitical realities and enables the creation of a more balanced and stable security environment in the region, reducing the number of unknowns and potential risks. Neutrality could indeed prove a stabilising factor in the case of Ukraine, as well as other states located between Russia and the West. Under current circumstances, it seems the only alternative approach that could prevent European security from further deteriorating. It is also one that could be acceptable to all sides, including the countries concerned.<sup>11</sup>

The OSCE's 'Final Report and Recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project' from 2015 underlined the necessity of reaching an agreement on the security status of the states located between

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Allison concludes. Other proponents of the idea of neutrality for Ukraine include John Mearsheimer (2014) Josh Cohen (2014) and Stephen Walt (2015).

<sup>10</sup> Few academics discussed the idea, but a broader debate was missing. See for example Jeffrey Simon (2009), or Viktoria Potapkina (2010).

<sup>11</sup> The idea of a neutral zone in Europe goes back to the post-Second World War period when George F. Kennan, US ambassador to Moscow after 1947 and father of the 'containment' strategy, called for a neutral, nuclear-free Central Europe, for the reason that he did not believe that there could be any other way to unify Germany.

Russia and the West as one fundamental prerequisite for relaunching cooperative security. The report stresses the right of each country to choose its own security arrangement, but at the same time, it emphasises the collective responsibility of NATO allies and neighbouring countries to work together to strengthen the security of Europe as a whole by taking into account the legitimate security interests of all. One option the report urges consideration of is neutrality as a possible status for the “in-between states”.

In his book from 2017, published as part of a Brookings Marshall Paper series, Michael O’Hanlon calls for a new security architecture for Eastern Europe that would be built on permanent neutrality. He suggests establishing a zone of neutral states that would stretch from Finland and Sweden in the north, through Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus, encompassing the South Caucasus, as well as Cyprus and Serbia, and possibly several other Balkan states. O’Hanlon argues that NATO enlargement has gone too far. Only a non-aligned zone, instead of a sphere of influence, between Russia and the West will be able to ensure stability and reduce the risk of escalation between Russia and the West.

In a similar vein, a report by the RAND Corporation from 2018 emphasises the de-escalatory potential of non-alignment for states located between Russia and the West: “A revised regional security architecture, in which the ‘in-between states’ would opt for not aligning with either side, would not automatically resolve existing conflicts in the region, but certainly it would give an impetus to effective conflict management” (Shapiro and Dobbins in Charap et al. 2018, 22).

### **The Austrian model of neutrality**

After the end of the Second World War, Austria—which had previously been part of the German Third Reich—was occupied by the four victorious powers. The country was divided into four zones, whereby the United States, Britain, and France jointly occupied the west and the Soviet Union the east of Austria.

Negotiations between the Allies and the Soviet Union over Austria’s future status began as early as January 1947 in London within the framework of the Council of Foreign Ministers. For both the Western powers and the USSR, which were now on opposing fronts, preventing Austria’s integration with the other side was of major concern. From 1953, there were growing indications that the Soviet Union would agree to withdraw its troops from Austria only if the country committed itself to becoming neutral by not joining any military alliance in the future. The other condition was related to the Soviet Union’s economic interests and concerned the disposition of German assets in the eastern zone it occupied.<sup>12</sup>

Agreement on all outstanding issues, which were subject to negotiation over the preceding eight years, was achieved in April 1955 in Moscow. On 15 April, Austrian

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<sup>12</sup> The Soviet Union demanded rights concerning oil production and assets of the Danube Shipping Company in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, and received a lump sum payment for German assets it transferred to Austria.

leaders and their Soviet counterparts signed the Moscow Memorandum, in which Austria—most importantly—declared its will to become a permanently neutral state.

The Moscow Memorandum made the signing of the Austrian State Treaty one month later possible, paving the way to Austria's full independence. The *State Treaty for the Reestablishment of an Independent and Democratic Austria*, which was signed on 15 May and came into effect on 27 July 1955, ended Austria's occupation by foreign powers and restored independence and national sovereignty of the country. The State Treaty included several obligations such as the prohibition of unification with Germany (*Anschluss*) (Art. 4); the protection of the rights of the Slovene and Croat minorities in Carinthia, Burgenland, and Styria, including the right to their own organisations, meetings, and press in their own language (Art. 7); the maintenance of democratic institutions (Art.8); the dissolution of Nazi organisations (Art. 9); and the prohibition of a variety of special weapons, including atomic weapons and self-propelled and guided missiles.

Neutrality as Austria's future status, however, was not codified in the Treaty itself. The reason for this was that Austria tried to avoid the image of a *neutralised* state. Its primary concern was that neutrality codified in a treaty resulting from agreement with and between great powers would give the impression of having been imposed on the country, which would make its neutral status less respectable (*ibid.*). Hence, on 26 October 1955, the Austrian National Assembly adopted the *Federal Constitutional Law on the Neutrality of Austria* only after Austria regained full independence (i.e., after the withdrawal of all foreign troops). Austria's free will to adopt neutral status is emphasised in Art. I (1) of the law:

For the purpose of the permanent maintenance of its external independence and for the purpose of the inviolability of its territory, Austria, of its own free will, declares herewith its permanent neutrality which it is resolved to maintain and defend with all the means at its disposal.

Austrian neutrality is unique both historically and globally. It is modelled on the Swiss concept, which was regarded as *classic neutrality*, that is, one which is protected by its constitution, as opposed to the examples of Finland, Sweden, or Ireland. Nevertheless, the Swiss model was not more than an orientation for Austria. In fact, from the beginning, Austria had a different, less restrictive, understanding and interpretation of neutrality to Switzerland. Whereas at that time Switzerland understood its neutrality both in military as well as political and economic terms (ruling out joining a customs union), the essence of Austria's neutrality was its military character. Austria's neutrality law only prevents Austria from joining a military alliance and from deploying foreign troops on its soil. Art. I (2) says,

In order to secure these purposes Austria will never in the future accede to any military alliances nor permit the establishment of military bases of foreign States on her territory.

This was emphasized by Chancellor Julius Raab at the time of the law's adoption, when he referred to Austria's neutrality as "military neutrality" that would not

include any “obligations and commitments whatsoever in the economic and cultural field” (quoted by Luif in Hey 2003, 97).

At the core of Austria’s neutrality are military obligations: its commitment not to join military alliances and not to allow the stationing of foreign troops on its soil. The legal principle that neutral states are required to refrain from all direct or indirect participation is in line with international law as stated in the Hague Convention of 1907 on sea and land war. The principle was not enshrined in the Declaration, but it resulted from the prevailing understanding of neutrality. While Austria adopted an *armed neutrality*, its State Treaty prohibits Austria acquiring offensive weapons.

Because Austria adopted the status of permanent neutrality as a sovereign state by national law, it lies therefore primarily in its own capacity to define and interpret its neutrality in accordance with international law. At the same time, Austria cannot unilaterally abandon its neutral status because it cannot change the international law which its status is based upon. Technically, all member states of the United Nations which Austria had diplomatic relations with in 1955 and signed the document at the UN would have to be consulted. Furthermore, since Austria’s neutral status is also enshrined in its constitution, changing it would require a two-thirds majority in parliament.

The difference between Austria and Switzerland’s interpretations of neutrality was also expressed in their different approaches to foreign policy. Whereas Switzerland had for a long time followed a fairly restrictive approach to foreign policy, Austria’s interpretation of neutrality has been more flexible, which saw its reflection in a wider scope of foreign policy action. Contrary to the Swiss model of “sitting still”, Austria aspired to follow the path of “engaged neutrality” (Gärtner 2017). Austria joined the United Nations in 1955, the Council of Europe in 1956, and the European Free Trade Association in 1960. Its capital Vienna served as an *East-West hub* during the Cold War for meetings between the presidents of the United States and the Soviet Union, John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev in 1961, and between Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev in 1973. Vienna was also chosen as the third UN capital next to New York and Geneva and the seat of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), UN specialised agencies, including UNODC, and the secretariats of OPEC and the OSCE (formerly CSCE).

Neither did neutrality preclude Austrian integration with the West and membership in the European Union. Soon after the end of the Cold War, Austria adopted Western values and started the process of integration into the market economy, which eventually led to its accession to the European Union. Following a national referendum, the Austrian National Assembly amended the Austrian constitution in order to be able to join the EU in 1995. In the same year, Austria joined NATO’s Partnership for Peace programme and it has cooperated with NATO allies in numerous areas since. Beginning in the 1990s, Austria has also been participating in international crisis-management under the auspices of the UN and EU, and contributed to the NATO-led peacekeeping force in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and later Kosovo and Afghanistan.

## **Austria's lessons for Ukraine**

It is axiomatic that each country's development and search for its position in the international environment is unique. It also goes without saying that the experience of each country embarking on the path of neutrality is determined by different domestic and external factors that make every country's approach to neutrality *sui generis*. The fluidity of the concept allows a country to create its own model of neutrality adequate to its domestic needs and foreign policy priorities.

Applying the Austrian case to Ukraine, as in this chapter, does not imply that the Austrian and Ukrainian cases are identical. Several factors, including the historical setting, the domestic situation, and external dynamics account for differences between them. Nevertheless, Austria presents an interesting and valuable case that could serve as a guideline for Ukraine. In a similar way to Austria, Ukraine finds itself trapped between the East and West, struggling to become a subject instead of an object of great power games. The Austrian State Treaty is an example of a well-functioning reciprocal security guarantee which provided benefits to both the external powers (the guarantor party) and Austria (the guaranteed party) (Shapiro et al. 2018, 19).

### *Lesson 1: Removing external pressure and restoring sovereignty*

The changed geopolitical setting after the end of the Second World War, Austria's role during the war, and the diverging interests of the Western powers and the Soviet Union in the post-1945 period all had the effect that Austria's future became subject to the negotiation of external powers. Neutrality as the country's future status was thought of as a guarantee for preventing a renewed Anschluss to Germany, which was feared by the Soviet Union and France (Bischof 2017), as well as insurance for both the Soviet Union and the West that Austria would not move into the orbit of the other side. Especially for the Soviet Union, Austria's bloc-free existence represented assurance that the country, which ideologically and politically was increasingly leaning towards the West, would not become part of the Western military alliance. For Austria, neutrality meant protection from a potential partition of the country into a Western liberal bloc and a USSR-led Communist bloc, and a means to get rid of the occupying forces and restore its full independence and sovereignty.

It is important to remember that neutrality, albeit adopted by Austria by national law, is not exactly the result of its deliberate and self-initiated decision. Essentially, it was *de facto demanded* by external powers. Nevertheless, accepting it allowed Austria to benefit from its added-value and turn it into a successful domestic and foreign policy instrument.

### *Lesson 2: Strengthening national identity*

Although initially Austrian neutrality was about regaining full sovereignty, over the longer term, it enabled the country to develop a strong national identity for the

first time since the First World War. Together with its increasing economic prosperity (partly thanks to the Marshall Plan and a large industrial base<sup>13</sup>), neutrality created a sense of national pride among Austrians. Until today, Austria's neutral status is deeply ingrained in its identity and enjoys high support throughout society.<sup>14</sup>

### *Lesson 3: Engaged neutrality – A strategic foreign policy*

Once Austria adopted the law on neutrality, it was able to rebuild its relations with its neighbours and members of both the Western and the Communist blocs. Ever since, neutrality has significantly shaped Austrian foreign and security policy thinking. During the Cold War, neutral status allowed Austria to stay out of the East-West standoff politically and militarily; its security was essentially based on the country "belonging to nothing" (Marcovits and Reich 1997, 106).

Nevertheless, neutrality did not exclude Austria's membership in the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the European Union. Neither did it rule out military cooperation with other countries and with NATO within its Partnership for Peace programme. Moreover, Austria turned neutrality into a successful diplomatic instrument of active engagement in international politics. Especially during the era of Chancellor Bruno Kreisky from 1970 to 1983, Austria emerged as an important mediator and bridge-builder (*Brückenbauer*) between two opposing blocs and increased its prestige on the international scene. With the changing conditions of the international environment after the end of the Cold War, Austria has remained actively involved in international conflict management and mediation. While neutrality is not a prerequisite for mediating between conflict parties, it certainly makes a country a more credible dialogue facilitator. It was the neutral status of Austria and Switzerland that allowed both to mediate in the Ukraine crisis since its outbreak. Moreover, in certain cases, non-NATO states are far better suited for peacekeeping operations than NATO members. A NATO mission in the Georgia conflict in 2008 would probably have resulted in an escalation with unpredictable consequences. Non-NATO states are better suited for many tasks, for instance the crisis in Lebanon or a potential peacekeeping force in the Gaza Strip.

### *Lesson 4: Room for political manoeuvre*

Perhaps the most important lesson from Austria's history of neutrality for Ukraine is that the concept of neutrality is fluid and offers room for interpreting neutrality and implementing it in practice. Restricting the definition of neutrality to the military sphere precluded only its membership in a military alliance and the

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<sup>13</sup> See Jelavich, Barbara (1987) *Modern Austria Empire and Republic 1815-1986*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge

<sup>14</sup> In 2019, 80 per cent of respondents declared that they consider Austria's neutrality important. See <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/992825/umfrage/wichtigkeit-der-neutralitaet-in-oesterreich/>

stationing of foreign troops on its territory, while allowing much room for manoeuvre in its foreign policy.

As maj. gen. Johann Frank (in Gärtner 2017) points out, neutrality must not be seen as a factor that limits a country's options in foreign and security policy, but one that expands them instead. Neutrality translates not only into the opportunity to actively contribute to conflict management and mediation, but also the possibility of staying out of international interventions. As a non-member of a military alliance, a neutral country does not have the obligation or pressure to participate in interventions when it doubts their success and feasibility. Moreover, it gives a country the freedom to be proactive on its own, which membership in a military alliance might otherwise constrain due to opposition by other members. In this sense, Austria was on the one hand able to stay out interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, but actively advocated the destruction of Assad's chemical weapons in Syria.

Austria's experience with neutrality proves that neutrality is not a rigid institution. It is a flexible approach that can have multiple meanings and serve different functions within its existing legal framework. Along with a changing geopolitical environment, Austria's neutrality has been evolving and is different in form today from what it was in 1955. Like a chameleon, it has been adapting to changes in the international political environment. Having initially served as a means to regain full sovereignty and independence, over the course of the Second Republic, neutrality has gradually become a centrepiece of Austrian national identity and the key pillar of Austrian domestic and foreign policy.

#### *Lesson 5: The minority rights issue*

An important part of the 1955 Austrian State Treaty is the wide-ranging guarantees towards ethnic minorities. Article 7 of the treaty granted the Slovenes living in Carinthia and Styria and the Croats in Burgenland an official minority status. The Slovene and Croat languages were recognised as official languages, in addition to German, to be used in administration and legal affairs as well as education in the three federal provinces. By the end of the Second World War, Yugoslavia made territorial claims on a part of Carinthia. Dropping the request was partly bound to Austria's granting of linguistic rights to the ethnic minorities in the treaty (Thränhardt and Bommers 2010, 197).

Another example in Austria's historical experience of how granting wide-ranging rights to minorities can have a stabilising effect are the provisions of 1969 for the German-speaking minority in South Tyrol in Northern Italy. Once successfully implemented, separatist tendencies gradually vanished. Granting South Tyrol autonomy significantly improved the situation of the minority group within the Italian territory.

In simplified terms, Austria's added value of neutrality manifests itself in three main functions which could apply to Ukraine: a defensive-protectionist function, a consolidating function, and the function as a foreign policy strategy:

- First, neutrality is a *survival* or *protection strategy* that allows a country to achieve some level of security and stability. Adopting a neutral status removes the external pressure generated by the geopolitical environment, and thus helps overcome the dilemma of its position in a great power game.
- Second, neutrality has a *consolidating function*. It can play an important role in constructing an identity and uniting a country's society.
- Third, neutrality functions as a *foreign policy instrument* that enables the development of an independent foreign policy. Neutrality frees a country from the obligations and pressure that membership in a military alliance entails; it provides the freedom to develop relations with different states as a neutral state is not guided by *friends and foes* thinking; and it allows the state to perform meaningful functions in global affairs, such as mediating disputes.

## **A neutral Ukraine**

The Austrian example provides a number of benefits that neutrality can have for a country facing similar challenges. All differences between the Austrian and the Ukrainian cases notwithstanding, the added value of Austria's lessons in neutrality and the functions it performs might apply to Ukraine.

Cheng (2017) succinctly summarises the added-value of neutrality with regard to Finland, which also holds true for Ukraine. He writes that, "[n]eutrality neutralizes (or mitigates) the magnitude of political interests and agenda setting power of various domestic actors in foreign policy debates, but also neutralizes (or de-sensitizes) the preferences and strategic visions of outside actors – the Soviet Union and the West – in a tender bipolar constellation of world politics for its regime security and territorial stability".

A neutral Ukraine would ease both Russia and the West's perceptions of insecurity as a result of their uncertainties about the other side's intentions, with a potentially de-escalatory and stabilising effect on their relations and the region as a whole. Most importantly, alleviating the external pressure from Ukraine would allow the country to develop an independent policy and relations with both sides, without having to fear resentment from the other side.

Finding an equilibrium position between the East and West could also help Ukraine ease the path towards national reconciliation and contribute to building a strong identity. A neutral status could allow Ukraine to turn its geographical location into an asset. Instead of being a playground for great power rivalries, it could become a hub and mediator between the East and West and a contributor to peace and stability in the region. Adopting neutrality with a narrow definition—as Austria did—would give Ukraine much room for manoeuvre in formulating its foreign policy decisions.

Acknowledging the potential benefits of neutrality will be a process and will require fresh out-of-the-box thinking and strong political will, most notably from the Ukrainian political elite. Readiness for compromise and flexibility from all negotiating parties will be key for agreeing the specific terms of Ukraine's future.

Any solution to Ukraine's future status must consider its geographic position and involve its neighbours, who have a strategic interest in the country. Only if all parties' security concerns are eliminated will Ukraine and the region become more stable and secure. Hence, for Ukraine's neutrality to be respected and sustainable, negotiations preceding the adoption of a neutral status must involve Russia and the West, in addition to Ukraine itself. Given the contestation over Ukraine's status, there is no long-term solution without the agreement of external powers on the terms of Ukraine's future. Their involvement in negotiations would also be a backup against the risk that Ukraine unilaterally abandons its neutral status as the result of an opportunistic move by a Ukrainian political leader in the future. Western negotiating parties could include the United States, as well as Germany and France as representatives of the European Union that are also parties of the Normandy Format. The process towards Ukrainian neutrality could be guided and facilitated under the auspices of the OSCE.

Based on the Austrian model, all parties involved in the negotiations could sign a Ukrainian state treaty after having reached a compromise. The document would outline mutually acceptable and legally binding security arrangements of both Ukraine and the external powers, as well as several other commitments of all parties, including the aim to create a shared economic space that would enable Ukraine's economic cooperation with both sides, the commitment to rebuild Ukraine's economy, and the regulation of Russian minority rights. The document would include Ukraine's declaration to become neutral, however, in order to avoid the (self-)image of a *neutralised* state, as was the case with Austria, after signing the document, Ukraine would officially adopt its neutral status by passing a constitutional law enacted by its domestic institutions.

The law on neutrality would define Ukraine's neutrality in negative terms as non-membership in a military alliance, non-participation in foreign wars, and non-stationing of foreign troops on its territory. The commitment not to join any military alliance would require that Ukraine eliminates from its constitution the provision regarding Ukraine's will to join Western institutions. Contrary to Austria, Ukraine would not join the EU either. Apart from the obstacles to Ukrainian membership in the EU—most notably its non-fulfilment of the membership criteria and the lack of support from all EU member states—it is highly unlikely that Russia would not oppose Ukraine's EU accession, at least as long as the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) remain incompatible.

Nevertheless, neutrality would not exclude Ukraine's non-institutional integration and cooperation with the West. Ukraine would be able to continue its cooperation with the European Union and NATO as part of the Partnership for Peace programme.

In exchange for adopting a neutral status, Ukraine should be offered—by the powers guaranteeing its neutrality—several security guarantees that would be written into the state treaty, as proposed here: Dobbins and Zagorski (2018) suggest a set of multilateral security guarantees for all states “in-between”, which could be applied specifically to Ukraine. Part of these measures would be the commitment of both sides to abstain from deploying combat forces on Ukraine’s territory. Joint military exercises between Ukraine and any country or alliance could be conducted in a transparent and verifiable way. The security guarantees by the Western states and Russia would be supported by a set of reliable and verifiable arms control measures, including the commitment of both sides to establish a demilitarised zone along the respective borders with Ukraine, where neither the stationing of substantial combat forces nor the conducting of large-scale military exercises would be allowed. Dobbins and Zagorski (ibid.) further suggest establishing both bilateral and multilateral platforms which would enable the in-between states—in this case Ukraine—as well as Russia and the West to address any concerns regarding the security arrangements. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), as the most inclusive organisation, of which are all states are members and which would also sign Ukraine’s state treaty, seems the most appropriate institution to oversee such arrangements.

The provisions of the Ukrainian state treaty would include the pledge of all parties to allow for Ukraine’s economic cooperation with both sides. This will require that both sides come to an agreement to make Ukraine’s cooperation with both the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union compatible. To achieve this, a working group within the OSCE could be set up and commissioned with the task of elaborating on the technical steps that would make the EU and the EAEU compatible.

Furthermore, all signatory parties could commit themselves to take part in rebuilding Ukraine’s economy and set up a kind of Marshall Plan, as was the case with Austria after the Second World War.

Apart from that, Ukraine should reiterate its commitment to grant a new status and wider autonomy to Eastern Ukraine, as defined by the Minsk II Agreement. The autonomy for the Donbas could be modelled on the South Tyrol case. As with the concept of neutrality, here Ukraine could also apply Austria’s diplomatic lessons and use the Austrian-Italian deal as a guideline.

Using the analogy of the Austrian State Treaty, a Ukrainian treaty should explicitly guarantee minority rights, most notably the rights of the Russian minority, which forms the largest minority group in Ukraine, making up 17.3 percent of the population. For comparison, other minorities living in Ukraine such as Belarussians, Moldovans, Hungarian, Poles or Romanians each constitute less than half a percentage point. Technically, the Declaration on the State Sovereignty of Ukraine from 1990 requires that the Ukrainian state respects the right to equality of all peoples and non-discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity. Furthermore, the declaration asserted that the Ukrainian state commits itself to promoting the “development of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of all indigenous peoples and national minorities” (Art. 11).

Since the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine however, along with deteriorating relations with Russia, Ukraine has taken several measures to restrict the rights of minorities, which has primarily affected the Russian minority group. In February 2014, one of the first moves of the new parliament was to abolish the law "On the principles of the State language policy" from 2012. The law gave the status of a regional language to several minority languages, including Russian, which was the primary beneficiary of the legislation, in areas of the country where national minorities exceed 10 percent of the population. In the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine where a significant of the population speaks Russian as its first language, Russian became a second official language, making possible its use in courts, schools, and governmental institutions. Since the annulation of the law in 2014, Ukrainian is recognised as the sole official state language. Furthermore, in September 2017, the Verkhovna Rada passed an education law affecting the use of minority languages in higher education by making Ukrainian the required language of study in state schools from the fifth grade on.

The adoption of neutrality by Ukraine must be preceded by several other steps in order to eliminate several impediments towards enabling Ukraine's equilibrium position between the East and West.

First, NATO must officially take the prospect of Ukrainian membership off its agenda. This would make Ukraine's aspiration to join the Alliance, which was written into the constitution on 7 February 2019, as the country's "strategic mission" obsolete and make removing in from the constitution easier. As a matter of fact, real prospects for Ukraine joining the Alliance are dim, both in the short term and the distant future. Therefore, the aim of joining NATO is not a strategic goal it could implement in any case. NATO member states' appetite for further enlargement is decreasing in general, and NATO members continue to be divided over further expanding the Alliance and particularly over Ukrainian membership. While states on NATO's eastern flank, most notably Poland and the Baltic States, support NATO's further eastward expansion, a large number of other states, including Germany and France, remain sceptical, if not opposed to the idea of offering membership to Ukraine. Moreover, it is highly questionable whether NATO would be willing to defend Ukraine once the need to invoke Art. V arose, starting a war with Russia and risking a nuclear exchange. Hence, given the insincere nature of NATO's promise of membership to Ukraine, it is difficult to think of other reasons than the Western attempt to instrumentalise Ukraine for its own political reasons.

Taking Ukrainian membership officially off NATO's agenda would both end NATO's false promises towards Ukraine, which are unlikely to materialise anytime, and remove what continues to significantly irritate Russia. NATO membership will not make Ukraine more secure, but risk deepening instability in the region and preventing the de-escalation of tensions between Russia and the West. Instead, NATO should adopt an approach that will allow for both addressing the security perceptions of all its members and developing cooperative security arrangements with Russia.

Moreover, as long as Russia does not have a guarantee that Ukraine will not join Western institutions (as in the form of a neutral Ukraine), the status quo, that is, an instable Ukraine with an ongoing conflict on its territory, remains the best guarantee that Ukraine will not join Western institutions.

Second, it is not realistic that Ukraine will join the European Union anytime soon either. Ukraine is not likely to meet the membership criteria, nor will all EU member states agree to accept Ukraine as a new member. Hence, instead of holding out the prospect of membership, the EU should develop a new type of relationship with Ukraine by starting to allow for close relations with the EU and the EAEU.

In fact, closer economic cooperation between the EU and the EAEU would allow Ukraine to make full use of its economic potential and increase the wellbeing of Ukraine and its society, and potentially also have a positive effect on peacebuilding efforts in Ukraine. Hence, it should indeed run in parallel to the political resolution of the conflict in Ukraine—the Minsk II process (Vasileva 2017). Furthermore, a shared economic space would have a positive effect on the establishment of a common and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community as enshrined in the OSCE Astana Declaration of 2010 (ibid).

Third, Ukraine will have to acknowledge that Russia will not return Crimea. The same applies to the West which has made the lifting of economic sanctions it has imposed on Russia contingent upon the return of Crimea. Acknowledging this would not mean giving up on its rules and values and revoking the statement that the annexation of Crimea is a violation of international law. Nevertheless, upholding this statement and making Russia giving back Crimea to Ukraine contingent upon normalising relations are two different things. Demanding that Russia returns Crimea is unrealistic, hence making it a condition will keep the situation deadlocked as it is.

Last but not least, the Ukrainian political elite must involve Ukrainian society in the debate on Ukraine's future. Reaching out to Ukrainian civil society from all regions in Ukraine and involving the Russian minority group is key.

### **A neutral *and* resilient Ukraine**

Its numerous benefits notwithstanding, neutrality is not a panacea for all of Ukraine's malaises. Adopting neutrality will not automatically make the country more secure, stable, and prosperous. It enables the removal of outside pressure and gives breathing space for developing a more independent policy; it eases the ground; it provides a framework for a transformation. Yet, for neutrality to function and unleash its full potential, it is indispensable that a country adopting neutrality builds robust national resilience in societal, political, and economic terms.

In physics, resilience is the capability of a strained material to recover its size and shape after deformation caused especially by compressive stress. Resilience in the context of national security refers to the ability of societies to manage

threats and risks, to adapt to them, and to recover from them in the case of an unexpected event or attack, without losing the ability to provide basic functions and services to members of the society (Tamminga in Giegerich 2016, 69). National resilience makes a country less susceptible to both internal and external attempts at disruption and attacks of both military and non-military natures. A country is as much exposed to these attempts as its vulnerabilities and grievances that can be exploited allow for.

Essentially, today, Ukraine is reaping what it has sown over the past two decades. High corruption spreading through all of its institutions, oligarchy, the lack of sustainable domestic reforms, a poorly performing army, weak state institutions, and a polarised society—all these developments have plagued Ukraine and made it a vulnerable state. They have harmed its ability to formulate and implement an independent and strategic policy.

Adopting neutrality would not exempt Ukraine from continuing political and economic reforms towards strengthening good governance. Accountable and transparent democratic institutions are key capacities in national resilience. Another pillar of national resilience is economic security and the wellbeing of all citizens. Its absence leads to social and economic grievances, which account for a society's disillusionment and alienation from its political elite and provide grounds for exploitation by external powers. Part of Ukraine building resilience is also strengthening its civil society in all parts of the country. Another key element in Ukraine's resilience is granting equal rights to ethnic minority groups living in the country, particularly the Russian-speaking population, which forms more than 17 percent of the population. The more they feel isolated and unfairly treated by the Ukrainian government, the easier it is for Russia to exploit their grievances.

## **Conclusion**

Ukraine's striving for a peaceful and prosperous future can only succeed if a long-term solution is implemented that addresses fundamental European security issues which are at the very core of the current crisis. It is crucial to find an arrangement that adequately responds to the realities and takes into account the needs and interests of all sides. Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO is neither realistic nor would it allow the country to become more secure and stable; on the contrary, it would further escalate the situation. Moreover, Ukraine's societal division on the future orientation of the country would only sharpen, risking further alienation within its society. Adopting a neutral status by Ukraine on the other hand, should be acceptable to all sides, and would facilitate the road towards peace, security, and the wellbeing of Ukrainian society. Acknowledging that neutrality might indeed be a viable solution for the current deadlock requires courage for innovative thinking from both academia and the political elites on all sides. While to many this option may seem unrealistic and radical, it might well be that only a creative solution and radical steps can change the current state of play.

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## **Abstract**

Heinz Gärtner and Maya Janik argue that instead of further aspiring for membership in Western institutions, Ukraine should become neutral. Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO is neither realistic, nor would it make the country more secure and stable, but would further escalate the situation instead. Neutrality on the other hand, would allow Ukraine to overcome the insecurity dilemma it finds itself in as a result of the Russia-West geopolitical competition and Ukraine's institutional weakness that makes it vulnerable to external pressure. The authors suggest that Austria, which adopted a neutral status in 1955 amid the post-War East-West confrontation, could serve as a reference point for Ukraine's model of neutrality. Its path toward and experience with neutrality offers several valuable lessons learned which are relevant for Ukraine. At the same time, the authors stress that while neutrality might indeed facilitate Ukraine's road towards a peaceful, stable and prosperous future, it is not a panacea. In fact, for neutrality to function and be credible, Ukraine must build institutional resilience.

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