

East or West? Ukraine's quandary

Introduction

The Russia-Georgia war scared the Ukrainians. It demonstrated that Russia is willing and able to use military force on a scale heretofore unseen in its dealings with post-Soviet states. Also, the recognition of South-Ossetia's and Abkhazia's independence made plain that Russia no longer considers itself bound by the underlying principle of the post-Soviet settlement that the borders of the old Soviet republics should be respected as the borders of the now independent states.

Despite the revealed problems with hardware and training, the war was for Russia a military success. It moreover came at a low cost in terms of international reactions. No major or long lasting sanctions were imposed on Russia. Still, there were costs in terms of especially Western countries now trusting Russia less than before the war. The negative effects of this loss of trust, however, are not necessarily immediate or alarming, and therefore probably do not concern the present Russian leadership very much.

The aim here is to examine some of the most important effects of this war on Ukraine, and also to discuss to what extent these effects might lead to changes in Ukrainian policy. Three areas stand out as particularly important in terms of what impact this war could have on Ukraine: Russian-Ukrainian relations; domestic political stability and cohesion; and Ukraine's aspirations for membership in the EU and NATO. It will be argued in this article that the war is likely to have significant and long lasting effects on Russian-Ukrainian relations, but only minor effect in the two other areas. It will also be argued that any Ukrainian efforts to minimize the chances of ending up in such a conflict itself, are likely to be muted, partial and inefficient unless the Ukrainian political elite is able to break with its tradition of continuous infighting.

The analysis starts with a short introduction to Ukrainian elite geopolitical orientations. Then follows a more detailed explanation of why only Russian-Ukrainian relations are going to be seriously influenced by the war, and why Ukraine is not likely to take a more proactive position with regard to Russia unless serious problems in the Ukrainian elite are solved first. This is done in order to support the argument that even if the war did send a chill down the spine of most Ukrainian politicians, that in itself is no guarantee that Ukraine will produce a policy to make something similar happening in Russian-Ukrainian relations less likely. Finally, the main arguments are summarized in a conclusion.

A short roadmap to geopolitical sympathies among Ukrainian elites

In terms of geopolitical sympathies the Ukrainian elite can roughly be divided into a pro-Western and pro-Russian camp. The pro-Western camp consists of the so-called Orange parties (Our Ukraine-National Self-defence, the Timoshenko block and to some extent the Litvin block); a majority in the foreign and security political establishments (the Ukrainian officer corps, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs); and a majority in the foreign and security political expert milieu (government and independent think tanks, commentators and analysts in the media). The pro-Russian camp consists of the different left parties (the Ukrainian Communist Party by far the most important), the Party of Regions, and significant parts of the local bureaucracy in Eastern and Southern Ukraine and Crimea.

A major issue concerning the pro-Russian camp is to what extent the pro-Russian rhetoric is genuine. Undoubtedly many politicians in this camp have ideological and/or identity based motives for close relations with Russia. However, others use this rhetoric instrumentally to attract votes in Eastern and Southern Ukraine, and in the Crimea. Since independence in 1991, Ukrainian politics has shown that politicians tend to forget many of their pro-Russian slogans once in office. Both former President Leonid Kuchma and former Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, now leader of the Party of Regions, are examples of this. Leonid Kuchma quickly abandoned most of the pro-Russian slogans from his election campaign after he became president in 1995. When he went to Moscow after his victory to discuss the reinvigoration of the relationship, he was told by the Russians that reinvigoration was good but would have to take place on Russian terms. Faced with this message, Kuchma first turned to the West and then adopted the so called “multi-vector approach”. Another example is the adaptable position of Victor Yanukovich and the Party of Regions on the issue of NATO-membership. Today, in opposition, this party is the main force against membership. However, when Yanukovich was Prime Minister for the first time (2002-2004), his government was much more sympathetic to NATO membership and even dispatched troops to help the US in Iraq.

Ukrainian interpretations of the war

The war demonstrated that what many Ukrainians had thought impossible, or at least highly unlikely, could in fact take place. Independently of where they put the blame, the fact that Russia used such massive military force against a former Soviet republic made a huge impression. One of Prime Minister Timoshenko’s advisers, Oleh Medvedev, said in the aftermath of the conflict that “if anybody had said two months ago that Russia could come to attack Ukraine, most would have laughed. But the events in Georgia sobered us up”.¹

It is possible that many in the pro-Russian camp also have become more afraid of Russia. For many in this camp the pro-Russianness is to a significant extent an opposition strategy. The pro-Russian camp has been in office and has a reasonable chance of coming to office again. With realistic chances of again governing Ukraine, few of them are ready to return to Russian domination. In that light the Russia-Georgia war is bound to have hit some nerves, even if for tactical electoral reasons they will be careful not to criticize Russia.

Another widespread Ukrainian interpretation the author found during conversations with politicians and political analysts in Kiev was that the war happened because Saakashvili walked into a trap set by Moscow. The war was premeditated by Russia, the country just needed a pretext to initiate it. The lesson for Ukraine is that the country needs to be better than Georgia in indentifying and avoid traps. In this interpretation the blame is on Russia for wanting violent conflict, but it is also on Saakashvili for being stupid enough to allow himself to be trapped.

Many Ukrainians also tend to explain aggressive Russian behaviour with reference merely to the fact that Russia is a great power. In this interpretation hostile Russian behaviour is seen as something natural and unavoidable, and as something that most great powers do. Ukraine is just unlucky to be the neighbour of such a power.

¹ O.O Medvedev at the seminar *Rosiisko-Gruzynskii konflikt: Prychyny ta naslidky dlia evropeiskoi bezpeky* (The Russia-Georgia Conflict: Causes and Consequences for European Security), National Institute For Strategic Studies, Kiev, 14 September 2008, report on the Internet at <http://www.niss.gov.ua/book/vidannya/Gruziya.pdf>, p.19.

In addition to the war itself, important parts of the Ukrainian political elite were further enraged by the Russian accusations that Ukraine had fuelled the war by selling arms to Georgia. Nobody has denied that these arms were sold, but the Ukrainian leadership has claimed that this happened before the war and did not break international conventions. Still, the accusations led to an investigative committee being set up by the Ukrainian parliament in order to find out whether anybody with executive power had behaved illegally. The committee did not find evidence of foul play, but the Russian accusations and the parliamentary investigation did create additional turbulence within the political elite. For many this stirrup was yet another example of Russia's ability to create problems in Ukraine, and therefore one more reason to keep Russia at a distance.

The fact that the war made a huge impression on the Ukrainian political elite, possibly also in the pro-Russian camp, does not necessarily mean that it remains high on the agenda today. Since August 2008 Ukraine has experienced a serious gas conflict with Russia and become one of the European countries most seriously hit by the international financial crisis. The political discussions in Kiev today are clearly dominated by these latter events and not by the Russia-Georgia war. Especially the financial crisis is a leading political theme. Thus, it is likely that the gas and financial crises have made the Russia-Georgia war a less salient issue than it otherwise would have been.

Russian – Ukrainian relations

The war has made an already improbable rapprochement between Russia and Ukraine even more unlikely. This is especially so because both countries are more likely than before the war to take preparatory steps with an eye to future conflict. Such steps can in turn be seen by the other party as unreasonably hostile, and thus prepare the ground for future security dilemmas. Compromises in day to day affairs, such as the January 2009 gas crisis, will still be found, but at the deeper level of strategic thinking and planning the parting of ways is getting more cemented.

The effect is strong in terms of loss of trust. Trust can be defined as “a bet on the future contingent actions of others”.² One can of course argue that there was little trust in the relationship in the first place, and thus that there was little to be lost. That, however, would probably be to underestimate the effects of the war. To Ukraine the war demonstrated that Russia was willing to use force to an extent hitherto unknown in state-to-state conflicts in the post-Soviet space. To Russia, Ukrainian policy before and during the war demonstrated that the country was ready to use any means short of direct military involvement to aid Russia's enemies. Both the Ukrainian arms sales to Georgia before the war, President Yushchenko's vocal support of Georgia during the war, and the Ukrainian efforts to limit Russia's use of the Black Sea Fleet, all seriously enraged Moscow. It seems fair to say that as a result of the war both countries have crossed a threshold in terms of their mutual distrust. It may not be the last threshold, and it may not even be a threshold of no return, but it is nevertheless a significant threshold. For Russia the strong Ukrainian diplomatic and military hardware support for Georgia constitutes the threshold. For Ukraine the heavy Russian military response towards Georgia and the disregard for post-Soviet borders by the recognition of South-Ossetia and Abkhazia constitute the threshold.

² Bo Rothstein (2005), *Social Traps and the Problem of Trust*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p.108.

Many Ukrainians now expect that the combination of Russian military success and low international costs are likely to lower the point at which Russia contemplates future use of military force. For example, in Ukrainian media there were those who speculated during the January 2009 gas crisis that Russia at some point may decide to use military force in energy disputes. Such speculations were not common in Ukraine before the Russia-Georgia war.

In the immediate aftermath of the war there were calls for a rapid strengthening of the Ukrainian armed forces. Some even argued that the return of a Ukrainian nuclear weapons capability should be discussed. It is quite possible that the Ukrainian military industry is able to produce such weapons if the political leadership so desires. However, most of the calls for stronger defence were about conventional weapons.

The calls were to some extent also followed up by action. The minister of defence announced that additional military units would be moved to the Crimea and towards other parts of the border with Russia. In addition, there has been a reemphasis on deterrence capabilities. First and foremost the planned reduction in the number of troops was halted by a decree from the Ukrainian Defence and Security Council in January 2009. The planned end to the conscription at the end of 2010 was delayed by five years. The official explanation for the decision was that the government had not provided sufficient funds, and also that it had been slow in implementing military reform. The measure was, however, also widely seen as a response to the Russia-Georgia war. Ukraine now looks set to maintain an armed force of about 150 000 troops for some time. Other efforts that have a deterrence character are the modernization of the MiG-29 fighters, the efforts to supply the Ukrainian Black Sea Fleet with new corvettes, and, most explicitly of all, the building of a new tactical missile system. This system cannot be used in international operations, and therefore has no other use than as a deterrent. The decision to build the system was taken long before the Georgia war, but was given higher priority as a result of the war.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to say that the Russia-Georgia war has led to military hysteria in Ukraine. The idea of an outright war between Russia and Ukraine is still alien to all but the most anti-Russian parts of the political establishment. Instead, there seems to be an increased focus on the possibility of smaller scale military encroachments from the Russian side in order to achieve limited political objectives. If something like that were to happen, many expect that it would evolve from some conflict connected with Crimea.

There are several issues that could spark controversy here, such as the territorial disputes in the Azov straits and Azov Sea and conflicts between Crimean Russian speakers and Tatars. However, the most important Crimea-related test for the two states ability to solve conflicts peacefully is the ending of the basing agreement for the Russian Black Sea Fleet in 2017. What is going to happen in 2017 is already an issue of major controversy between the two states. Russia has made clear that it would like to prolong the agreement, but the Ukrainian authorities have said this is out of the question. In Autumn 2008 Ukraine approached Russia with a proposal to already now start the planning process for the transfer of the fleet away from Sevastopol. This initiative created considerable irritation on the Russian side. Unless very pro-Russian political forces win coming elections in Ukraine, the relationship between the two countries is heading for rocky waters in 2017.

After the Russia-Georgia war international commentators suggested that because the Ukrainian military (about 150 000 troops) is much larger than the Georgian (about 30 000 troops), that alone will serve as a significant deterrent on Moscow. As explained above, that

also seems to be the view of the Ukrainian political and military leadership. The assumption can, however, be questioned. There has been very little rearmament of the Ukrainian military since 1991, and in addition it is relatively sharply divided between the 30 000 strong Rapid Reaction Forces (RRF) and the rest. The RRF get most of the training, and also most of what little new equipment that has been purchased. Thus, one could make the argument that in reality only the RRF would be able to mount serious resistance to a foreign aggressor. That would especially be the case if there was a significant element of surprise in the attack, and if the political goals were limited. If the Russians too, thought that only the RRF was capable of serious opposition, the deterrence effect could be smaller than Ukrainian authorities expect.

East and West in Ukraine

Also the Ukrainian population is split in its geopolitical sympathies. The stereotype is that Ukraine west of the river Dnipro is pro-Western and East of the Dnipro pro-Russian. That is only partially true. The regional divisions of identity and political preferences have no clear demarcation line. Instead of a clear-cut split between East and West, there is in fact a split between East (32 % of the population), South (15 % of the population, including Crimea), Centre (30 % of the population) and West (23 % of the population). The crucial component here is Central Ukraine, which serves as a moderating force by combining elements of identity and political preferences from both East and West. It is further important to keep in mind that popular pro-Russian sympathies in the East and South should not necessarily be interpreted as anti-Ukrainian. This is one of the reasons why all attempts to instigate a serious separatist movement in Eastern Ukraine have failed. Most Eastern Ukrainians have accepted life in independent Ukraine, they just feel strongly that the country should remain on good terms with Russia. The East-West split in the Ukrainian population is real and difficult to mend, but also less politically explosive than often assumed.

The Russia-Georgia war could potentially exacerbate the East-West split in the Ukrainian population in at least two ways. First, Ukraine could become an even more East-West polarized society, which in turn could make it more difficult to reach the national compromises necessary to build a more coherent and stable society. Second, the successful departures of South-Ossetia and Abkhazia from Georgia could serve as examples for political forces with similar ideas in Ukraine. The suggestion that Crimea could become the next post-Soviet separatist region with Russian support was much discussed internationally after the war. The argument here, however, is that with the possible exception of Crimea, the war will not affect Ukraine's internal stability much.

One sociological survey shows that the interpretation of the Russia-Georgia war among the Ukrainian population largely followed expected regional patterns. The South and East showed most sympathy for the Russian side, the West showed most sympathy for the Georgian side, and Central Ukraine was in the middle. The surveys, however, also show a number of other notable points. For example, only in Southern Ukraine (including Crimea) did more than 50 % of respondents identify Georgia as "the real aggressor" (56,8 %). In largely Russian speaking Eastern Ukraine 37,2 % saw Georgia as the "real aggressor", 13,8 % Russia and 18,6 % both. Only 30,7 % of respondents in Eastern Ukraine saw the Russian military response as being justified. Among the other regions 54,6 % in Southern Ukraine, 12,9 % in Central Ukraine and 4,2 % in Western Ukraine saw the Russian military response as justified. Thus, the sympathy for Russia's handling of the conflict might be said to be notably low, at least in Eastern Ukraine.

In the same survey 25 % of respondents in Western Ukraine found Georgia's behaviour legitimate, against only 8,1 % in Central Ukraine.³ Another survey further shows that the elite conviction that Georgia fell into a trap set by Russia also had strong popular support. To the question of whether they thought Georgia's behaviour was an "emotional response to Russian provocations", more than 50 % say yes in all Ukrainian regions (61,5 % in Central Ukraine, 58 % in Western Ukraine, 56,3 % in Eastern Ukraine and 53,5 % in Southern Ukraine). Held together, these surveys indicate that many, especially in Southern Ukraine, simultaneously think that Georgia fell into a trap set by Russian provocations, and that the Russian actions were legitimate.⁴ The major finding, however, is that both Central and Eastern Ukraine have a moderating effect on political polarization, and therefore on the potential for political tensions in Ukraine as a result of the war.

Neither does it look as if the war is going to increase the possibility of separatism in Ukraine. Separatism ceased to be a serious concern for Ukrainian politicians after the failure of Crimean President Iurii Meshkov to pull Crimea away from Ukraine in the mid-1990s. This was the only attempt at separatism in independent Ukraine that had a significant popular basis. The Crimean separatist leaders, however, were never united on much more than their hatred of the central government. The Ukrainian authorities were therefore able to successfully defuse the whole movement by granting Crimea a higher degree of autonomy than other regions of Ukraine. Apart from pro-Russian sentiments there is little that Crimea has in common with South-Ossetia and Abkhazia. The latter have been outside Georgian control since the early 1990s, whereas Crimea has been under Kiev's control. There is still a potential for popular support for separatism in Crimea, but this potential was not awoken by the Russia-Georgia war.

The issue of separatism also briefly resurfaced in Eastern Ukraine in connection with the Orange revolution. At that time many influential Eastern Ukrainian politicians gathered in Donetsk to demand a South Eastern Autonomous Region modelled on the special privileges currently enjoyed by Crimea. At this congress there were also calls for separating eastern regions from Ukraine, but the main emphasis was on the more moderate demands for autonomy.

Despite the limited potential for separatism in Ukraine, the Russia-Georgia war has again put the issue more firmly on Kiev's agenda. There has been more talk in Ukrainian political circles about the danger of "fifth columns" than what has been heard for a long time. In addition to the talk there has also been some action. For example, the Ukrainian security service SBU in December 2008 announced that it had stopped the activity of pro-Russian organizations with Russian financial backing in three Ukrainian regions, Donetsk, Crimea and Transcarpathia, in an effort to prevent separatism. Since none of these organizations can be said to have had much popular backing or even public visibility, one might question whether their closure can be said to constitute a victory in a battle against separatism. There is a danger that zealous behaviour on this issue actually could provoke more support for such organizations than they otherwise would have been able to garner. However, any large scale hunt for fifth columnists does not seem to be on the agenda.

³ Survey made by the sociological service of the *Ukrainian Center for Economic and Political Studies* 21-29 September 2008 (http://www.uceps.org/ukr/socpolls.php?cat_id=105).

⁴ Survey made by *Taylor Nelson Sofrez Ukraine* 11-22 August 2008 for the Ukrainian weekly *Zerkalo Nedely*, (<http://www.zn.ua/search/?ChosenDay=29&ChosenMonth=8&ChosenYear=2008&recnum=0>)

Ukraine's integration with the West

The war is not likely to have much effect on Ukraine's integration with the West. The inability of the Ukrainian political elite to transform the democratic victory of the Orange revolution into efficient and reform-oriented government is a much more decisive element in terms of Western integration than any increased sympathy in the West with Ukraine's precarious security situation. However, there are signs that as long as membership itself (EU and NATO) is postponed, Western countries might be somewhat more ready than they were before the war to support Ukraine in its "westernization". The war probably brought home to more leaders in the West that developments in the non-Russian former Soviet republics is not something that cannot be safely ignored. That is especially the case with Ukraine, because of the country's size and geographical location.

In terms of the prospects for Ukrainian EU membership, mixed signals now seem to come out of Brussels. On the one hand, the Ukraine fatigue, a result of deep disappointment with the Ukrainian political elite after the Orange revolution, seems higher than ever. On the other hand, the idea that there in some distant future may be a place for Ukraine in the EU might actually have become stronger. At least, statements to the effect that Ukraine can never become a member are now rare.

In terms of NATO integration, some in the West may have become more weary of the possibility that Ukrainian membership could make Article 5 commitments uncomfortably likely. Discussions in Western media over whether or not the West would be willing to fight Russia over Ukraine in case of Ukrainian NATO membership suggest that at least some deem the costs of admitting Ukraine unacceptably high. Others were motivated by the Russia-Georgia war to increase support for Ukraine. Geoff Morrell, Pentagon press secretary, said in December 2008 that the main reason why Defence Minister Robert Gates attended the meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels was that he in the aftermath of the Russia-Georgia war wanted to send "a very strong signal of his support for Ukraine and the Baltic states and our other NATO allies from Eastern Europe that the United States stands firmly behind them".⁵

Still, the main pre-war obstacles to Ukrainian NATO membership are probably the most important ones also today: the political instability of the Ukrainian elite; the low popular support for membership, and the desire by several European NATO members, most notably Germany and France, not to antagonize Russia.

The war did not have any significant impact on popular support in Ukraine for NATO membership either. One survey found a slight increase in support from 20,9 % to 22,3 % from June to September 2008, but by December 2008 the support had decreased to 17,8 %. Other surveys showed similar figures.⁶

Ukrainian state capacity

Despite all political differences and other conflicts within the Ukrainian political establishment, it is still reasonable to assume that a majority in the political elite see their

⁵ Tom Shanker, "On NATO's Table, Ukraine and a Test of Russian Ties", *New York Times*, 11 November 2008.

⁶ See survey by the *Ukrainian Center for Economic and Political Studies* at http://www.uceps.org/ukr/print.php?lng=UKR&&poll_id=46&&address=poll and survey by *FOM-Ukraine* at <http://www.kyivpost.com/nation/30003/print>.

country as being in a significantly more demanding regional position now than it was before the Russia-Georgia war. The challenge thus becomes whether the country will be able to actively influence the new regional dynamics or not. It is obviously better to try to influence events with an eye to promote Ukrainian national interests than just to react to the statements and actions of others. However, to become a subject in these processes there is a need to reach domestic agreement on at least some important issues, and also be able to implement the policies agreed upon.

The political history of Ukraine since independence in 1991, however, suggests that the country has particular problems in formulating a proactive policy. This lack of what might be called “state capacity” is in particular caused by two distinct, but interlinked features of contemporary Ukrainian political life: the lack of social capital and the rentier character of the Ukrainian state.

First, Ukraine is a country with little social capital. Bo Rothstein argues that the concept *social capital* should be understood as “the number of social contacts multiplied by the quality of trust in these relationships”.⁷ Within the Ukrainian political elite there is no shortage of contacts, but the “quality of trust in these relationships” is dismal, not only between the different political forces, but also to a great extent within them. In such a climate political issues have a strong tendency to be approached more in terms of how they can influence the domestic balance of power than how their handling might promote national interests.

Second, the main sources of political friction in Ukraine are still money and power, not ideas and policy alternatives. It seems fair to state that *rent seeking*, understood as the exploitation of political office for personal material gain, is widespread in the Ukrainian political system. This is not to say that ideas and policy alternatives are unimportant, but they seem, as motivational factors for seeking political office, often less important than money and power. The major political forces frequently suspect each other of ruthlessly exploiting political offices to promote their business interests, and therefore judge they have no alternative but to do the same. This means that an issue such as what to do to avoid a Georgia-like scenario gets much less attention than it would if the political leadership was less made up of opportunity and rent seekers. This combination of low social capital and rent seeking motivation is able to prevent most external shocks from leading to adequate policy responses. This was most clearly demonstrated by the Ukrainian handling of the January 2008 gas crisis. Conflicting players on the Ukrainian side, seeking private gain, both contributed to the outbreak of the crisis, and undermined the ability of the country to speak with one voice during the conflict.

Thus, it would be no surprise if the lessons from the Russia-Georgia war resulted in few or no efforts to make Ukraine a subject rather than an object of regional developments. There seems to be two major and not necessarily mutually exclusive options for Ukraine in this regard. Ukraine can try to deter Russia, and it can try to improve relations. In terms of deterrence the country can do two things. It can increase its own military strength and/or join a military alliance. Both are easily hindered by the mentioned twin problems. The main reason why Ukraine missed the window of opportunity to get MAP (Membership of Action Plan) status in NATO in 2008 was the unstoppable infighting in the Ukrainian political elite.

⁷ Bo Rothstein (2005), *Social Traps and the Problem of Trust*, p.66.

The same phenomena has also hampered military reform. Rent seekers take little interest in military reform other than by participating in the battle for the privatization of valuable pieces of military property. Similarly, issues of military reform have many times been exploited in the domestic power struggles. Unless the problems of low social capital and rent seeking behaviour are reduced, the traditional disinterest in the armed forces is likely to continue. When Ukraine experienced continuous economic growth from 1999 to 2008, this did not lead to significantly more defence spending. And, in the face of the international financial crisis, where Ukraine is one of the countries hardest hit, funds have decreased even more. The proposed outlay for the armed forces in 2009 is only 0,85 % of GDP, down from 1,3 % in 2008.

The other main strategy besides deterrence that Ukraine could adopt to make a Georgia scenario less likely, is to improve relations with Russia. However, this also demands that the Ukrainian elite agrees on a common approach. Instead, the tendency today is that each political force, and sometimes even individual politicians, on their own try to manage the bilateral relationship. Thus, Ukraine has not one but several uncoordinated Russia strategies. In this situation Russia has no real partner to conduct discussions with, and the country is constantly exposed to the temptation of increasing its influence in Ukraine by playing the different Ukrainian actors off against each other.

Conclusion

The Russia-Georgia war did have a serious impact on strategic thinking in Ukraine. Those who already argued that Russia was dangerous felt vindicated and their conviction hardened. Some of those who publicly tended to support Russian positions might, at least in their strategic thinking, have become more weary of Russia. These effects, however, seem to be mostly an elite phenomenon. On the popular level, beyond a temporary small upsurge in support for NATO membership, opinion surveys show little change in how Ukrainians think about friends and foes.

The war seems to have had little impact on Ukrainian policy. It does not appear to have given cause for any overhaul of Ukrainian Russia strategy. All major events, including this, end up being treated more as tools in the domestic power struggle than as issues that need policy responses. On top of this the potential effects that the war could have had on Ukrainian political thinking were seriously diluted by the January 2009 gas crisis and the international financial crisis. If these other new crises had not occurred, more reflection and resulting political action could have taken place as a result of the war.

The main conclusion is therefore that less has changed in Ukrainian political life as a result of the Russia-Georgia war than what might have been expected. This is especially striking given the relatively radical change in the rules of the game in the post-Soviet space that this war created. It is, however, possible that the effect is stronger than current political action and rhetoric seem to indicate. It is likely that in Ukrainian strategic thought, currently muted by domestic political squabbles, a more serious re-evaluation of relations with Russia is taking place as a result of the war. This re-evaluation may surface as policy if Ukrainian politics becomes less domestically troubled in the future.