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ARTICLE

Ukraine's Strategic Interactions with the EU and Russia during the Turbulent Month of the Crimean Annexation

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Abstract
What shapes a country's foreign policy formation in times of crisis? This article explores the factors that were behind the response of Ukrainian decision makers in their relations with Russia and the European Union during the annexation of Crimea between February 21 and March 26, 2014. I view Ukraine's foreign policy through the lenses of an analytical framework inspired by game theory, where the decision-making process is divided into four parts—information about others' preferences, trust in interlocutors, everyone's payoffs, and resources. This article employs a rigorous qualitative thematic analysis of 38 elite interviews, numerous primary documents, and media reports. The core finding suggests that the uncertain times and unpreparedness of Ukrainian decision makers obstructed them from a comprehensive analysis of the environment and formation of the country's foreign policy strategy, which, consequently, facilitated Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Keywords: annexation of Crimea; EU-Ukraine-Russia relations; foreign policy analysis; Ukraine's foreign policy

Introduction

What shapes a country's foreign policy in times of crisis? Whereas one school of thought argues that global politics is determined for the most part by powerful players, other ones find that international norms and interdependencies can also regulate international relations. Thus, when disagreement among major powers and/or flaws in the implementation of international laws brings about conflicts, less influential states may still be able to navigate their foreign policy toward more positive (to them) outcomes. In my research, I use a game theory framework to explain the crisis decision making of individual politicians in their relations with foreign interlocutors. Specifically, my research question asks, *Which factors shaped the response of Ukrainian policy makers in their interactions with the EU and Russia during the annexation of Crimea (February 21–March 26)*? I do not seek to put responsibility for the annexation on Ukraine but to analyze and explain Ukraine's foreign policy in its relations with the EU and Russia and provide hints into its further development.

Scholars have articulated Russia's decision to annex Crimea as a spontaneous exploitation of a "favorable" context in which it could act unilaterally in the uncertain aftermath of Euromaidan mass mobilization, which—provoked by the fleeing of then President Viktor Yanukovych—left a power vacuum and weak state apparatus. However, the literature would benefit from a nuanced study of how individual Ukrainian politicians viewed the situation through their own perceptions and consequently interacted with their EU and Russian interlocutors during the dangerous events in Crimea. Thus, theoretically the article borrows from the game theory perspective and traces the

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influence of four factors on Ukrainian leaders' foreign policy decision making: information about others' preferences, trust in interlocutors, everyone's payoffs, and the resources available. It is not the objective of this article to explain the outcome of this annexation—a task that involves a much broader set of issues and actors (including the role of the United States). Instead, the main focus of my analysis is confined to Ukraine's strategic decision making in relations with central actors in Europe—the EU and Russia—during the annexation of Crimea. This first phase of the Russian aggression against Ukraine developed into Russia's war in Donbas in spring 2014 and its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Thus, establishing an understanding of Russia's original justifications, goals and actions, and the EU's and in particular Ukraine's analysis of them and reactions to them provides us with a better understanding of the current Russian-Ukrainian war. The article relies on original data from 38 in-depth elite interviews with Ukrainian, Russian, and EU policy makers, official documents, and media outlets. The first part of this article briefly engages with the main scholarly literature regarding the annexation of Crimea and provides a theoretical framework against which interview material is analyzed. The second part outlines the data collection and analytical approach taken. The final part of the article presents the discussion of the empirical findings. The conclusion summarizes the main arguments and findings of what influenced Ukrainian leaders' decision making in relations with the EU and Russia during the annexation of Crimea. The core finding suggests that uncertainty and unpreparedness (for instance, due to post Euromaidan situation) and/or unwillingness to take the responsibility for crisis decisions on behalf of Ukrainian decision makers obstructed them from a comprehensive analysis of the environment they were operating under, thus facilitating Russia's aggression.

Framing the Analysis I: The Annexation of Crimea in International Relations Scholarship

Looking at the literature on the annexation of Crimea, I found that one group of scholars see the conflict as a product of the EU's penetration into Russia's traditional "near abroad" and a misunderstanding of Russia's interests, which, in their eyes, pushed Russia into protecting its security (Mearsheimer 2014; Sakwa 2015; Charap and Colton 2017). On the other hand, some scholars stress illegality of Russian annexation of Crimea (R. Allison 2014; Averre and Wolczuk 2016) and hold that Russia damaged security on the European continent (Haukkala 2016; Gehring, Urbanski, and Oberthür 2017). Others argued that Russia was "exploiting areas of uncertainty in international law" to justify its actions in Ukraine (R. Allison 2014) or explored Russia's self-justification of the legality of this annexation (Dubinsky and Rutland 2019). Some pointed out the EU's underestimation of Russia's interests in Ukraine (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2014; Pastore 2014; Haukkala 2016) or the EU's own inconsistencies and lack of clarity in its foreign policy in the wider Eastern Europe (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2014; Dragneva-Lewers and Wolczuk 2015; Averre and Wolczuk 2016; Haukkala 2016, 2018; Maass 2019). Koval et al. (2022) offered an interesting analysis of narratives about the Russian-Ukrainian war in academic and analytical publications in a few Western countries and discovered dependency between the development of Ukrainian or Russian studies, history and political attitudes in these countries, and the prevalence of pro-Russian or pro-Ukrainian narratives in presenting this war in academia. Although the scholars did indicate a lack of awareness of each other's preferences, different understandings of the environment, and of the other sides' capabilities, there were no comprehensive studies on how individual policy makers analyze the situation before making decisions on foreign relations. Thus, a precise look at leaders' decision making from a viewpoint of one country—Ukraine—will provide us with a novel explanation of how crisis foreign policy decisions are made and how they direct the ways in which conflicts develop.

Framing the Analysis II: Applying Game Theory Concepts

Although I build on the existing literature, I pay greater attention to how different actors with various capacities and/or tools at their disposal ultimately make different strategic calculi in

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different contexts. I borrow from the toolbox of game theory perspectives to explain Ukraine's decision making in times of crisis. Game theory has been widely applied to the understanding of conflicts around the world (Snyder 1971; Brams 1985; Snidal 1985; Hipel and Fraser 1988; Moore 1995; Gates and Humes 1997; Lynn 2005; Prosch 2007). The best-known example is the use of models—rational actor, organizational process, and governmental politics—to explain US-USSR interactions during the Cuban missile crisis (G. Allison 1971). In my approach, I also take into account actors' rationality (Model 1), issues related to crisis management and limited resources (Model 2), the preferences of individual policy makers, and poorly coordinated postrevolutionary actions on central and regional levels (Model 3). Surprisingly, game theory has not been consistently applied to the study of the conflict in Ukraine (but see analyses of the West-Russia relations in this respect by Ericson and Zeager [2015] and Veebel and Markus [2016] or Nychyk's [2023] discussion of Ukraine's decision making during the start of the war in Donbas). Therefore, this article seeks to enrich the literature on area studies and foreign policy analysis by studying individual policy makers' crisis management, employing a game-theory-inspired analytical framework, and concentrating on Ukrainian leaders' actions in relations with the EU and Russia during the annexation of Crimea (instead of only a discussion of the West-Russia relations).

The main focus of my analysis is not to theorize the annexation of Crimea as a "game" but instead to use four primary game theory concepts in a foreign policy analysis of the decisions of Ukrainian policy makers: information, trust, payoffs, and resources. Scholars suggest that in making decisions about relations with other states, officials require information about the preferences of all the actors involved in a given international interaction (Snidal 1985; Bennett 1995; Thompson 1995; Milner 1997; Michel 2013; Khumalo and Baloyi 2018). In addition, because crisis decisions are often made by a small group of leaders, whose own interests can differ from national ones (De Mesquita 2006, 638), the examination of the "leadership factor" forms an important parameter for the analysis of any conflict (Morrow 1986, 1133; Kydd 2000, 352; Nye 2005). Otherwise, a lack of understanding of the other state's internal power dynamics may result in miscalculations concerning its preferences on the international arena (Snyder and Diesing 1977; Pahre and Papayoanou 1997) while states' leaders need "to play simultaneous games at two separate tables" (Bennett 1995, 38). Therefore, my first subquestion is as follows: *What was the type and quality of information available to Ukrainian policy makers regarding the preferences of the EU and Russia during the annexation of Crimea*?

Other scholars have shown that it is not only the conflicting preferences that lead to conflicting behavior but also the uncertainty resulting from a lack of knowledge of and mistrust in the opponent's real intentions (Lieberman 1964, 272; Fearon 1995, 401; Michel 2013, 884; Devetak, George, and Percy 2017). Some scholars suggest that the concept "trust" might also include force (or threats; Hoffman 2002, 380), and others name this "power" (Bachmann 2001, 350) or "fear" (Snyder 1971, 84). Although Larson (1997, 714) sees "good intentions" as part of trust, he admits that force may be a way of establishing commitment in international relations (Larson 1997, 710). Thus, in this research, I use the word "trust" to describe faith in an interlocutor's words and actions —a correct prognosis of his/her steps. This brings me to my second subquestion: *To what extent was trust toward their interlocutors in the EU and Russia important in determining the strategy of Ukrainian policy makers during the annexation of Crimea*?

Although states rationally follow their own chosen goals, game theory analysis needs to reveal how states' preferences are reflected in their payoffs (Snidal 1985, 40). Different perceptions due to information processing and states' bureaucracies may lead to misperceived payoffs during decision making (Snidal 1985, 42; Bennett 1995, 30–31), which can result in worse outcomes for everyone (Snyder 1971, 80). The nature of the game (zero sum, negative, or positive sum) and its type (e.g., chicken or prisoner's dilemma) also has an influence on the distribution of payoffs. For instance, Snyder (1971, 92) showed that actors may change a conflict from a chicken game to a prisoner's dilemma when one party promotes its own structure of payoffs (e.g., by threats and provocations). Wagner (2000) stressed that wars may develop not because of a mistake but because of a well-thought-out deliberate decision directed at changing the payoffs of a game. Based on this, I form my

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third subquestion: *How did Ukrainian policy makers perceive Ukraine's and those of Russia and the EU payoffs*?

Last, available resources, and readiness to use them, may determine countries' power in international relations (Snyder 1971; Clausewitz, Howard, and Paret 1976; Moravcsik 2010). On the other hand, Wagner (2000, 470) pointed out that "while technology determines what is possible, states choose what sorts of wars to fight within those constraints, and an understanding of the relation between fighting and bargaining helps explain those choices." Scholars have highlighted the fact that countries are rarely ready to invest all of their economic and military resources in a particular war, so the outcome might depend not on the absolute comparison of adversaries' resources but on the extent to which they are willing to use them in a war (Snyder 1971; Clausewitz, Howard, and Paret 1976; Moravcsik 2010). From this, I form my fourth subquestion: *What was Ukrainian leaders' awareness of Ukraine's (and others') resources and readiness to use them during the annexation of Crimea*?

Data Collection and Analytical Approach

The main empirical source for this article is original data collected by the author via elite in-depth semistructured interviews with Ukrainian, Russian, and EU policy makers (politicians, diplomats, analysts, and journalists) during fieldwork in Kyiv and Brussels and via Zoom. Altogether 38 interviews were conducted (informed consent was provided). If so requested, the interviewees were anonymized using Chatham House rules, and where possible they are on record. People on different points on the political spectrum from various backgrounds and with a variety of opinions were chosen. The interview data were triangulated with the analysis of core documents (laws, transcripts of meetings) and media reports. The thematic analysis was applied to show the influence of information, trust, payoffs, and resources on Ukraine's foreign policy decision making.

Findings and Discussion

In the following discussion, I look at the four dimensions of decision making identified above and answer my research questions. I first look at information that Ukrainian decision makers had about other actors' preferences, and then I study their trust in others' actions. After this, I analyze the payoff structure (Ukraine's, EU's, and Russia's possible ways of acting and which of these options they preferred). Finally, I assess Ukrainian leaders' perceptions of the recourses available to all the actors and their readiness to apply them in Ukraine. In the conclusion, I estimate the role of these analytical tools in the foreign policy decision making of Ukrainian leaders during the annexation of Crimea.

Information

In line with the scholarly debate regarding information about others' preferences, my data analysis clearly demonstrates that the possession of such information was a central dimension in the capacity of actors to make strategic decisions during the annexation of Crimea. My findings uncovered flawed information collection and analysis by new Ukrainian decision makers, which can be partly explained by the postrevolutionary environment. This resulted in their imperfect understanding of both the EU's and Russia's preferences regarding Ukraine and consequently limited their foreign policy abilities.

Starting with Russia's preference regarding Ukraine, I have discovered its core objective in keeping control over Ukraine, which was not understood in full in either the EU or Ukraine. For instance, Ukrainian and EU policy makers reported the view that Russia's long-term preference was to prevent Ukraine from integrating into NATO and the EU (Int-3 2020; Int-5 2020; Int-7 2020; Int-31 2021). A former president of the European Council explained, "[Russia] tries to keep all those

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countries in the Western neighborhood [Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine] weak, in some way dependent on Russia" (Int-34 2021). An EU official, who is a leading specialist on the EU's relations with Russia and Ukraine, stated, "the fact that Ukraine oriented itself toward this linkage with Europe … meant that Putin was seriously dismayed" and that Ukraine did not want to join Russian-led integration organizations "was like a major geopolitical, geoeconomic and civilizational insult to Russian leadership" (Int-35 2021). A former member of the State Duma stressed that "the way EU-Ukraine Association Agreement was constructed was seen in Moscow as a threat" (Int-17 2020). Another EU official also told me that Russia saw DCFTA as "a geostrategic move" but at the same time that "Russia's position was clearly understood" (Int-12 2020). In this respect, scholars have explained how wars could start due to a mistaken understanding of the opponent's commitment to fight (Snyder 1971, 100; Bennett 1995, 32; Fearon 1995, 393–94). According to EU officials, although understanding Russia's preference, the EU was not able to predict how far Russia was ready to go to achieve its goal (Int-21 2020; Int-31 2021; Int-35 2021). Therefore, although I can observe some kind of understanding of Russia's long-term preferences both from Ukraine's and the EU's positions, there was no full awareness of the importance of these preferences for Russia and thus its readiness to fight for them. Apart from this grand preference—keeping control over Ukraine—let us briefly study Russia's interest in Crimean Peninsula.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Crimea was an apple of discord between Ukraine and Russia. D'Anieri (2019, 38–43) explains the complex historical (different historical elements support different ownership of the peninsula), social, and political situation (both Russia's claims and internal separatism forces) in Crimea. First, the claimed ownership of the Black Sea Fleet (that stationed in Sevastopol Bay) led to conflicts during 1993–1994. Both countries tried to include the fleet in their military; Russia declared Sevastopol to be Russian, and there were conflicting moments between the fleet's sailors and Ukrainians (Fedorovyh 2007; Wood et al. 2015; Vynogradova and Chervonenko 2017; D'Anieri 2019). The tensions cooled down after Ukraine's law On the Autonomous Republic of Crimea was accepted in 1995[1] and the Ukraine-Russia agreement On a Phased Settlement of the Black Sea Fleet Issue.[2] Yet in 1999, the Russian consulate in Crimea started issuing Russian passports to Crimeans before the 2000 presidential elections in Russia (*Kommersant* 1999). The 2003 Tuzla incident (Russia's illegal construction of the dam to the Ukrainian island Tuzla) kept relations between the two countries on the brink of war for a few weeks up until Ukraine's President Kuchma discussed this with Putin personally and the construction was stopped (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2003; Int-10 2020). The chief of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine during 2001–2014 had good knowledge of this, he mentioned the "always worrying situation in Crimea … due to the specificity of the Crimean population. There was a huge mass of people who remained there from the Soviet period. There were a lot of pro-Russian citizens, various pro-Russian political associations, and public organizations. And, of course, the huge 20,000 grouping of troops and forces of the Black Sea Fleet posed a threat" (Int-10 2020). Apart from this, Russia kept its control over certain media, youth organizations, and parties in Crimea (Wood 2015, 8–10). Putin's famous speech at the NATO Summit in Bucharest in 2008 confirmed once again Russia's preferences—unacceptance of NATO's expansion and keeping Ukraine in its sphere of influence—and it even included territorial claims to Crimea (*Unian* 2008). All of these could have given Ukraine's leaders good awareness of Russia's interests in Ukraine. Yet Russia's signals and the easily flammable situation in Crimea did not get proper attention from Ukrainian decision makers (in the section on resources, I mention my respondents' allegations regarding Ukrainian politicians, who have failed to halt Russian influence in Crimea since 1991). A study of information analysis of the new post-Euromaidan leaders in Kyiv will help us to understand this misperception further.

My empirical findings suggest that Ukrainian decision makers had access to some information, but they could not properly analyze and use it. One example is provided by a respondent who had access to senior Ukrainian decision-making echelons at that time and who told me that state organs were often providing inaccurate information either on purpose or unintentionally and that decision makers "had to rely heavily on people on the ground" (Int-7 2020). Ukraine's acting Minister of

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Foreign Affairs of that time provides another example: he acknowledged that he might have been receiving outdated information due to the dynamic situation (Int-36 2021). An independent foreign journalist in Ukraine explained that information was available but that the new politicians were in disarray and could not sit down and analyze the information they needed for critical decision making (Int-15 2020). Moreover, according to a Ukrainian analyst and a Ukrainian MP, certain state organs, like the Security Service of Ukraine, were incapable of performing their tasks properly because many of their previous workers had either left or were in a state of disorientation (Int-8 2020; Int-11 2020). Thus, Ukrainian decision makers lacked full information and were not in a position to be able to properly analyze and process it. According to game theory assumptions, this could be a valid obstacle to decision making.

Turning to Russia, one may say that it was well equipped to carry out its operation in Crimea in terms of access to information. My informants, analysts, and Ukrainian officials argued that Russian intelligence had been very successful in penetrating various Ukrainian services, which gave it accurate information about the thinking of Ukrainian policy makers (Int-7 2020; Int-8 2020; Int-6 2020; Int-9 2020; Int-1 2020). This is confirmed by other scholars' research (McDermott 2015) and was mentioned by senior Ukrainian officials during the meeting of the National Security and Defence Council on February 28, 2014 (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2016). A foreign journalist in Ukraine also said that "Russia was always three or four steps ahead of [Ukrainian authorities]" (Int-15 2020). Therefore, I would conclude that Russia had a certain information supremacy during the crisis in Crimea.

Looking at Ukraine's own preferences, the country's post-Euromaidan decision makers viewed the core preference in the EU integration, whereas the EU's preferences were to avoid a war and to keep economic cooperation with its neighbors. The new Ukrainian leaders settled Ukraine's final goal—integration with the EU and the end of dependence on Russia (Int-7 2020; Int-15 2020; Int-22 2020; Int-35 2021; Int-38 2021). However, it emerged from my interviews with EU officials and the EU's official communication that the EU wanted to cooperate with Ukraine and to preserve some kind of stability in the country (Int-2 2020; Int-12 2020; Int-21 2020; Council of the European Union 2014), and even this preference appeared to be far less relevant for the EU (this is discussed in more detail below) than was perceived in Ukraine (Int-15 2020). An EU analyst and EU officials confirmed that the EU wanted to sign the Association Agreement with Ukraine to have a stable partnership with the country (Int-2 2020; Int-12 2020; Int-13 2020; Int-38 2021), but according to a leading EU journalist, the EU could not offer anything more (Int-20 2020). In this way, avoiding an outbreak of a war (or any other instability) and economic cooperation with Ukraine could be seen as the EU's preferences. However, it will become clearer in further discussion that the EU's readiness to reach these preferences may also differ from Ukraine's perception. Thus, to see the whole picture, an analysis of the other dimensions of the game theory framework is required.

Trust

Apart from having information about others' preferences, the game theory approach requires decision makers to assess whether other actors' signals and strategies can be trusted. My empirical data suggest that Ukrainian leaders did not trust Russia's threats but trusted the EU's willingness to "save" Ukraine, which had negative consequences for the country during the Crimean annexation. First, respondents (both analysts and decision makers) stated that Ukrainian decision makers had information about Russia's unusual and aggressive actions in Crimea at the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014, but they could not believe that Russia would dare to annex Crimea (Int-7 2020; Int-8 2020; Int-5 2020; Int-3 2020). One example comes from a commander of a volunteer battalion, who said that in Crimea Ukrainian soldiers could not shoot at Russians due to a "brotherhood nation" perception (Int-11 2020). Another comes from a deputy commander of a battalion in Crimea, who told journalists that he was "101% confident" that Russians would not shoot because they had previously even trained together (5 Channel 2014). On the other hand, Ukrainian officials

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and analysts mentioned Ukraine's substantial trust in the declared readiness of signatories of the Budapest Memorandum—UK, US, and Russia—to guarantee the territorial integrity of Ukraine (Int-1 2020; Int-4 2020; Int-7 2020; Int-8 2020; Int-10 2020). Interestingly, an EU ambassador to Russia also pointed out that despite having warnings about possible Russian military actions in Crimea from intelligence, from researchers, and from interactions with Russians, the EU's leaders' common-sense understanding was that "No, that is impossible" (Int-23 2020). Thus, Ukrainian policy makers' trust in Russia's respect for Ukraine's territorial integrity could be explained both by a historical brotherhood myth and by Russia's (and other countries') guarantees under international agreements. These previous beliefs somehow blinded Ukrainian (and the EU's) decision makers, and they missed visible signals of Russia's coming aggression. Consequently, this might have influenced rational foreign policy analysis.

Although we know that Ukrainian policy makers had trust in Russia's good intentions, it is worth considering the nature of trust in EU-Ukraine relations. My data clearly show that Ukrainians had high hopes for the EU's actions against Russian aggression (Int-3 2020; Int-5 2020; Int-6 2020; Int-27 2020), which could be partially explained by their misunderstanding of the EU's procedures in this respect (as noted by both EU and Ukrainian policy makers; Int-5 2020; Int-12 2020; Int-20 2020). According to the chairman of Crimean Tatar Mejlis and MP, "there was a great expectation from international institutions, in particular the EU … to make decisions and to stop these violations of the rule of law" (Int-5 2020). On their part, EU officials acknowledged a certain trust in the words of their Ukrainian counterparts, although they had doubts about their ability to deal with all the problems the country had (Int-2 2020; Int-12 2020; 2020; Int-25 2020). In words of the former president of the European Council, "after the annexation, trust [between the EU and Russia] was disappearing" (Int-34 2021). Despite signs of Russia's illegal actions in Crimea, the EU did not break all ties with Russia but searched for "a way to deal with Russia in these circumstances" (Int-12 2020) and had "a policy based on necessity" and not on trust (Int-20 2020). Apparently, then, the EU and Ukraine had different perceptions of their mutual trust: Ukrainians imagined the EU having an obligation to support Ukraine and to stop the annexation of its territory, whereas the EU condemned Russian actions but did not openly confront them.

Turning now to Russia, my findings demonstrate that Putin apparently rejected dealing with new Ukrainian decision makers and distrusted the EU. Russian respondents pointed out that Russia could not trust the new leaders in Kyiv exactly because they broke the February 21 agreement with Yanukovych (Int-16 2020; Int-17 2020; Int-19 2020). Moreover, this also diminished Russian leaders' trust in the EU, whose representatives were present during the signing of the agreement[3] (Int-19 2020; Seipel 2014). Interestingly, Ukraine's acting Minister of Foreign Affairs explained that up until the beginning of April there was no contact between the new Ukrainian decision makers (also from his Ministry) and Russian leaders, although Russians kept communication with some of Yanukovych people, who either left or still hold some positions in Ukraine (Int-36 2021). Several respondents highlighted the fact that in Putin's view both Ukraine and the EU were highly dependent on the US in their policy making (Int-16 2020; Int-17 2020; Int-18 2020; Int-19 2020). Moreover, with no trust in multinational organizations, and in particular in the EU (Int-2 2020; Int-20 2020; Int-28 2021), Putin apparently preferred to discuss the situation in Ukraine with individual EU member states or with the US (the perceived main decision maker; Int-16 2020; Int-18 2020). Thus, the discrepancy between Russia's own perception of the situation (unrecognition of the new Kyiv authorities) and the views of other actors diminished the country's trust in the EU and Ukraine. And although in the next months this changed, almost no contact between Ukrainian and Russian officials due to mistrust during these few weeks of Crimean annexation may have been crucial (let us remember that the Tuzla incident was solved via personal contacts between the two presidents). This also created opportunities for purposeful misleading.

My analysis of the annexation of Crimea confirms scholarly arguments that in uncertain environments actors may use bluffing and threats (Bennett 1995, 20–21) to change opponents' perceptions and thus their actions (Fearon 1995). Ukrainian and EU policy makers highlighted the

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fact that during the Crimean annexation, Russia used bluffing strategies effectively (Int-2 2020; Int-6 2020; Int-11 2020; Int-13 2020)—for example, in denying its military presence in Crimea (Int-4 2020; Int-9 2020; Int-23 2020). Even more interesting is the claim made by the former ambassador of one of the Baltic states to Ukraine that acting President Turchynov was ready to fly to Crimea when the dangerous situation was developing, but in a threatening phone call from Russia, he was told that if he did so his plane would be shot down and that this resulted in abandoning the trip (Int-14 2020). Russia's telephone threat that it would start a full-scale war against Ukraine was also confirmed by Turchynov on February 28, 2014 (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2016). Already on April 17, 2014, Putin had confessed that the Russian military had "helped to conduct the referendum" (Putin 2014), which he later confirmed in a 2015 Russian documentary about Crimea (Kondrashov 2015). Ukrainian and EU officials recognized that these inconsistent and contradictory actions on the part of Russia made it harder for the EU and Ukraine to react (Int-12 2020; Int-36 2021). Therefore, Russia managed to deceive Ukraine and the EU regarding its actions in Crimea, which complicated their reactions. The further analysis of payoffs and resources will add more clarity to Ukraine's decision-making process.

Payoffs

Because we already know about Ukrainian leaders' limited understanding of others' preferences and their somehow mistaken trust in foreign interlocutors, we will now consider how Ukrainian leaders perceived the payoffs structure for Ukraine, the EU, and Russia during February–March 2014. The analyzed data suggest that Ukrainian decision makers' concentration on the country's preferred payoffs—closer ties with the EU and the preservation of Crimea—obstructed their analysis of the core payoffs for Russia (all parties respecting the February 21 agreement, stopping Ukraine's integration with the EU and, in the case of Putin, winning domestic popularity) and of the EU (to avoid a war over Crimea and to have the Association Agreement signed).

During February–March 2014, Ukrainian decision makers saw two payoffs for the country—integration with the EU and the preservation of territorial integrity. The new Ukrainian decision makers were advocating for faster integration with the EU (Int-5 2020; Int-7 2020; Int-24 2020), which was confirmed by EU policy makers (Int-21 2020; Int-38 2021). A foreign journalist in Ukraine expressed his shock that many Ukrainian politicians were really confident that Ukraine could join the EU in the next five years (Int-15 2020). On the other hand, Russian correspondents and a Ukrainian official observed a certain division among Ukrainians after Euromaidan (Int-10 2020; Int-19 2020; Int-28 2021). For instance, the support for EU integration in Ukraine's South and South-East was low. In Ukraine as a whole, 45.3% favored EU integration in March 2014 and 50.5% in May 2014 but only 28% in the South, 30.5% in the East, and 13.1% in Donbas (Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation 2014). Later, when the occupation of Crimea became a reality, Ukrainian decision makers concentrated on saving the country's territorial integrity (Int-1 2020; Int-2 2020; Int-4 2020; Int-8 2020; Int-21 2020; Int-5 2020). Ukraine's acting Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that Ukraine's objectives were to get the EU's support against Russian aggression and to complete the signature of the Association Agreement (Int-36 2021). Therefore, we can see that although many Ukrainians had a clear desire for Ukraine's integration with the EU, this did not have unanimous support in 2014 and was also never offered by the EU. Later, the focus of Ukrainian leaders switched to the preservation of Crimea. Below, we will study other actors' payoffs and how they were assessed in Ukraine, which will show that Ukrainian decision makers' perceptions did not always have realistic grounds.

We already know that Russia's foreign policy preferences were to keep control over Ukraine and to avoid close EU-Ukraine ties. Now we will see how Russia tried to achieve these goals. Euromaidan moved the Ukraine's foreign policy pendulum to the West, and the last option for Russia to keep its influence was the February 21 agreement (if Yanukovych had remained in the post of Ukraine's president for a year), which was neglected by both the EU and Ukraine. Scholars have argued that

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after Yanukovych fled Ukraine, the West celebrated its victory without paying attention to Russia, whose preferred option was respect for the February 21 agreement (Charap and Colton 2017, 126). This is confirmed by the February 22 request of the Foreign Minister of Russia to France, Germany, and Poland to put pressure on Ukraine to endorse the agreement (RBK Ukraiina 2014), as well as the March 7 reiteration of commitment to the agreement, as expressed by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2014). Rutland (2015, 137) has argued that Russia saw the breaking of this agreement as "the point of no return." A former deputy of the Russian State Duma stated that Putin perceived this as "a rude scam on the part of the West" (Int-17 2020). Thus, inattention to Russia's commitment to the February 21 agreement could possibly be a trigger for further changes in the payoff structure.

When the new leaders came to power in Ukraine and the February 21 agreement was left aside, Russia moved to a different form of action—the annexation of Crimea. A number of Ukrainian respondents argued that Russia hoped to achieve its preference of stopping Ukraine from integrating into the EU/NATO by means of its actions in Crimea (Int-3 2020; Int-7 2020; Int-38 2021). The chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People and MP originally considered that Russia's actions in Crimea were directed at giving Kyiv an ultimatum regarding integration into the EU, but later he understood that the actual goal was the annexation of Crimea (Int-5 2020). During the meeting of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine on February 28, 2014, the acting president of Ukraine stated that it appeared from various sources that Russia was really considering the possibility of annexing Crimea (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2016). However, the head of the Security Service of Ukraine suggested that Russia was waiting for Ukraine's response to use this as a pretext for starting a full-scale war against Ukraine (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2016). During the meeting of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, the acting President Turchynov proposed the introduction of martial law to protect Crimea, but other participants did not support this, fearing an all-out war with Russia in which they believed Ukraine would be defeated (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2016). The acting foreign minister of Ukraine called Russia's decision to annex Crimea "very emotional" and said that it happened because of Putin's desire "to take anything and rapidly" when everything else in relation to Ukraine was lost ("none of his forces, none of his politicians in Ukraine"; Int-36 2021). I can observe, then, that different political actors in Ukraine had diverse views on what was Russia's preferred payoff (though some did see the possibility of this annexation), which prevented them from forming a workable and consistent foreign policy in this respect.

Apart from stopping Ukraine from integrating with the EU and NATO, there could be another reason for Russia's annexation of Crimea—to increase President Putin's domestic support. Russian and EU analysts and politicians confirmed that Putin could have decided to annex Crimea with the goal of increasing his popularity at home, which was decreasing after the protests during 2011–2012 (Int-9 2020; Int-13 2020; Int-17 2020; Int-26 2020; Int-31 2021). The huge Russians' approval of the annexation—according to a Russian journalist, it was "bigger than their love for their mother" (Int-28 2021)—could justify this decision on the part of Putin. A former president of the European Council also explained that for Putin "the annexation of Crimea was a major nationalistic achievement" (Int-34 2021). A former deputy of the Russian State Duma and a leading EU analyst both stressed that Russia's payoffs were concentrated on the payoffs of the country's president (Int-13 2020; Int-17 2020). We see, then, how Putin's personal interest may have contributed to Russia's annexation of Crimea. Therefore, it can be argued that successful decision making in relation to Russia required an analysis of Putin's personal preferences. However, my Ukrainian informants did not mention this kind of analysis.

Turning to the EU's payoffs, I also found certain misperceptions on the part of Ukrainian decision makers. Although during the start of events in Crimea Ukrainian policy makers viewed the EU's core interest as the preservation of the international rule of law (Int-5 2020; Int-4 2020), after the annexation they understood that the main goal for the EU was not to have war break out in Europe (Int-3 2020; Int-4 2020; Int-5 2020; Int-11 2020). A number of Ukrainian policy makers who were in regular contact with their EU counterparts confirmed that the EU was opposed to open

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warfare more than anything else and so asked Ukraine "not to provoke Russia in Crimea" (Int-4 2020; Int-5 2020; Int-7 2020; Int-36 2021). Accordingly, an advisor to a senior Ukrainian official highlighted the fact that the EU promised Ukraine that it would resolve the situation with Russia over Crimea and urged Ukrainians not to take any further action (Int-7 2020). How were the EU's goals in Ukraine described by EU policy makers? An EU official confirmed that the EU understood Ukraine's preference for a stronger global reaction, which could possibly change Russia's behavior (Int-12 2020). However, according to EU officials, the EU did not see itself as a party to the conflict but rather a partner in its mediation and a supporter of Ukraine (Int-2 2020; Int-12 2020) or "an involved observer" (Int-21 2020). On the other hand, an EU analyst and Ukraine's acting Minister of Foreign Affairs suggested that at that time the EU was most concerned about the signing of the Association Agreement (Int-13 2020; Int-36 2021). A German MP also confirmed that the EU wanted the Association Agreement to be signed but said there was no option for Ukraine to integrate with the EU (Int-38 2021). This shows that there were certain misperceptions on the part of Ukrainian policy makers, who originally expected the EU to save Crimea from Russia and imagined fast integration into the EU. It will also become clear that these payoffs were confirmed by the readiness of different actors to employ certain resources for their achievement.

Resources

My empirical findings confirmed the assumptions of game theory concerning the importance of resources in decision making, but I also discovered the lack of full awareness on the part of Ukrainian leaders of everyone's resources during the annexation of Crimea. With respect to Ukraine's resources, the crucial ones were the political ability of the new leaders and the country's military might. On February 28, 2014, the Minister of Defence of Ukraine explained that in Crimea there was a maximum of 1,500–2,000 Ukrainian soldiers and 20,000 Russian ones (which Russia was increasing) and that Ukraine would not be able to protect itself against Russia in a full-scale war (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2016). In accordance with the previous agreement, the whole of the Russian Black Sea Fleet was stationed in Crimea,[4] which was seen as a threat by the Chief of the Ukrainian Border Guard Service (Int-10 2020). Although many interviewees pointed out the importance of an army in this conflict (Int-6 2020; Int-4 2020), Ukrainian policy makers confessed that during the discussed events the Ukrainian Army was disbanded (Int-8 2020; Int-36 2021). Moreover, acts of betrayal and transition of soldiers, employees of Security Services, and politicians to Russia in Crimea were reported by Ukrainian policy makers (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2016; Int-8 2020; Int-5 2020) which to some extent could be explained by lack of clear orders from Kyiv leaders (Int-10 2020; Int-19 2020). A Ukrainian MP and the acting Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that the Ukrainian state treasury was also drained after the fleeing of Yanukovych (Int-11 2020; Int-36 2021). The acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine also mentioned that when Russia started its actions in Crimea, a new government in Ukraine had yet to be formed (Int-36 2021). Ukraine was clearly in not the best shape at that time. Although we can see how scarce Ukraine's resources were, was there anything Ukrainian leaders could have done to protect Crimea?

According to one of the ambassadors of the EU countries in Ukraine, in February Ukrainian decision makers understood that Ukrainians were not ready to fight for Crimea (Int-14 2020). Given the poor state of the Army, Ukraine could have relied on volunteers, who later did support the Ukrainian Army in Donbas (Int-5 2020; Int-7 2020; Int-13 2020). My Ukrainian and EU informants pointed to the power of Ukrainian civil society after Euromaidan (Int-5 2020; Int-4 2020; Int-13 2020) and even assumed that if it had been better organized it could have prevented the annexation of Crimea (Int-9 2020). However, during the events in Crimea, the leaders in Kyiv did not think of the possibility of involving volunteers. Additionally, some Ukrainian policy makers mentioned that Ukrainian decision makers did not have enough "political will" to resist Russia, which was seen by them as a core factor in facilitating the annexation (Int-4 2020; Int-5 2020; Int-22 2020). Therefore, weak military resources and lack of political will on the part of Ukrainian high officials might have

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contributed to the annexation of Crimea. Let us move now to a discussion of the resources of Russia and the EU.

Considering Russia's resources, I have detected no agreement among the respondents on whether Russia possessed all the resources it needed to achieve its goals in Ukraine and whether Ukrainian decision makers had full or limited understanding of Russia's capabilities. On one hand, scholars (McDermott 2015) and both Ukrainian and Russian analysts and policy makers (Int-1 2020; Int-7 2020; Int-8 2020; Int-9 2020; Int-16 2020) provided evidence that Russian intelligence penetrated Ukrainian services substantially and it gained information about Ukraine's military capabilities, which facilitated the Crimean annexation. The chief of Ukraine's Border Guard Service also confirmed that during February–March 2014 the Russian Federation was monitoring the situation at Ukraine's border and was increasing its forces near the entire perimeter of the border (Int-10 2020). The former Ukrainian Chief of the General Staff Volodymyr Zamana explained that he was in possession of information regarding Russia's movements in Crimea in January 2014, which he reported to Yanukovych and later to the post-Euromaidan decision makers (Tikhonova 2015). Moreover, the chief of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine and the commanders of military units in Crimea were conveying regular updates on the situation in Crimea to the Ukrainian authorities (Int-10 2020; Int-11 2020). Thus, although Russia gained access to information about Ukraine, decision makers in Kyiv also received information about Russia's actions in Crimea.

Analyzing Russia's capabilities, both scholars and decision makers confirm that if Russia did "hold all the cards … Ukraine would have collapsed by summer 2014" (Sherr 2017, 31) or even "by March 2014" (Int-7 2020). However, Russia did achieve its goal regarding Crimea. Later in 2014, Putin confirmed that the Russian military was holding back the Ukrainian military in Crimea but did so only to allow people to vote in the referendum without bloodshed (Seipel 2014). According to a Russian political expert, Russia had greater political will to combine its recourses for achieving its goals in Ukraine, whereas "Ukraine did not have such will, desire, and ability" to unite against Russia (Int-9 2020). Some respondents mentioned that Ukrainian policy makers understood the extent to which Russia was ready to apply its resources in Ukraine (Int-2 2020; Int-8 2020) or that they quickly acquired such understanding in March 2014 (Int-7 2020). Others, however, doubt that this full understanding existed (Int-3 2020; Int-9 2020; Int-14 2020; Int-22 2020; Int-30 2021). Thus, we can say that Russia had substantial resources, in terms of both military and political decisiveness, to annex Crimea, and Ukrainian decision makers, although getting information from Crimea, lacked a full understanding of Russia's resources.

Another resource—preferences of some part of the Crimean population—happened to help Russia as well. Scholars (D'Anieri 2019; Wood et al. 2015) and Ukrainian politicians (Int-6 2020; Int-10 2020) emphasized the strong presence of Russia in Crimea before the annexation in the form of its information policy and its cultural, youth, and political organizations. Crimean Tatar politicians and a foreign journalist in Ukraine pointed out that the Ukrainian authorities did not pay enough attention to separatist issues in Crimea and the rights of Crimean Tatars during all of the 23 years of the country's independence (Int-5 2020; Int-6 2020; Int-15 2020). According to a Crimean Tatar MP, "Ukraine at that time did not understand what Crimea was. The authorities [in Kyiv] have often played on Russian separatist sentiments since independence" (Int-6 2020). The important role was also played by the Russian media in Crimea. The victory of Euromaidan and the ousting of President Yanukovych were portrayed in Crimean media as a coup d'etat, organized by far-right Ukrainians with active support from the West (Kondrashov 2015). During February–March 2014, Ukrainian decision makers were aware that a substantial part of the Crimean population was pro-Russian (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2016; Int-10 2020). For example, in February 2014, 41% of Crimeans wanted Ukraine to unite with Russia (with the average for Ukraine being 12%; KIIS 2014). However, the new authorities did not make a substantial effort to unite Ukrainians. Instead, they were advocating for the cancellation of the language law, which allowed the use of Russian as a regional language in Crimea.[5] This was seen by a Ukrainian social activist, a

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Ukrainian politician, and a Russian scholar as a fatal mistake, which played into Russia's hands (Int-3 2020; Int-26 2020; Int-27 2020). The Russian "documentary"[6] film argued that Crimeans were scared that they would be forbidden to use the Russian language, that the militia in Sevastopol started to form already in October 2013, and on February 22, 2014, Crimeans gathered on Lenin square and consolidated their will to fight against the new power in Kyiv (Kondrashov 2015). An independent foreign journalist, following these events, shared an opinion that if there had been a legitimate referendum in Crimea, it was very probable that the majority would have voted to join Russia anyway (Int-15 2020). Although this view cannot be proven, the support for Russia in Crimea was dangerous enough for politicians in Kyiv to pay more attention to the peninsula. Therefore, the alienation of the Crimean population from the rest of Ukraine was strengthened by certain missteps on the part of the new authorities in Kyiv and by Russia's resources (e.g., media) and actions in Crimea during and after the Euromaidan.

Understanding the scarcity of Ukraine's resources, Ukrainian politicians viewed the European Union as the last hope in holding Russia back, but the EU was not ready to fulfil Ukraine's expectations. In the beginning of Russia's military actions in Crimea, senior Ukrainian officials decided to seek help from the EU (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2016). However, several policy makers emphasized that Ukraine could have used its diplomatic resource better—for example, by using the Budapest Memorandum as a platform for an international solution of the conflict when the first "green men" appeared in Crimea[7] (Int-7 2020; Int-4 2020; Int-1 2020). Despite Ukraine's attempts to convince the EU to give more help to Ukraine, the EU was not ready to do so (Int-7 2020; Int-5 2020). The acting Foreign Minister of Ukraine mentioned that until mid-March the EU was "stunned and confused" (Int-36 2021). A Crimean Tatar politician was disappointed with the EU's reaction; he explained, "We had very high hopes for the European Community, but it must be said that they did not live up to these standards and symbols that they displayed for 50 years" (Int-6 2020). On the other hand, an EU official working on EU-Ukraine and EU-Russia relations wondered, "How can we interrupt intervention in Crimea? We cannot interrupt this. It is the difference between those who take power by traditional means and those who project power with modern means" (Int-35 2021). Another EU official explained that in the beginning the EU tried to apply its "usual toolbox" and only some time later [after the annexation] developed the new mechanisms (Int-12 2020). It was confirmed by both EU (Int-12 2020; Int-14 2020) and Ukrainian decision makers (Int-7 2020; Int-36 2021) that in the beginning Ukrainian policy makers lacked a full awareness of the extent of the EU's readiness to use its resources in Ukraine. Thus, Ukrainian misperceptions about the EU's help was an additional issue in the country's decision making at that time.

Last, time was another crucial resource. In Ukraine, the new post-Euromaidan decision makers required time to establish control, which influenced their ability to manage the country's resources and to quickly react to the threats (Int-8 2020; Int-10 2020; Int-36 2021). The chief of Ukraine's Border Guard Services confirmed that "with the time lag and such a rapid change of circumstances, it was very difficult to make comprehensive and correct decisions" (Int-10 2020). The EU's slow decision making was mentioned by both a Ukrainian politician ("prolonged in time and sometimes not timely EU decisions"; Int-11 2020) and an EU official ("it took us a while before we actually fully understood and started to react"; Int-12 2020). On the other hand, with just one decision maker in the Kremlin, Russia was able to make quick and effective decisions (Int-13 2020). Thus, neither Ukraine nor the EU were ready to react quickly to the unexpected and fast Russian actions in Crimea. It can be argued that Putin used the perfect moment (the first days after the revolutionary change of power in Ukraine) to organize the annexation quickly and smoothly.

Conclusion

This article has employed an innovative four-dimensional game theory framework as a tool of foreign policy analysis of Ukrainian decision makers' interactions with Russia and the EU during the annexation of Crimea (focusing on actors on the European continent only). Game theory

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literature suggests that countries' leaders are required to have information about the preferences of other countries, to analyze the extent to which the strategies of their opponents can be trusted, and to assess the payoff structure and resources of everyone involved. This analytical approach has helped me to explain the particularities of Ukrainian decision makers' perceptions, foreign policy analysis, and interactions with their EU and Russian counterparts. My core findings suggest that Ukrainian policy makers misjudged the preferences of their foreign interlocutors, misunderstood the appropriateness of trust in their strategies, and failed to fully grasp the payoff structure for all three sides—the EU, Ukraine, and Russia. This was further exacerbated by the Ukrainian leaders' inability to fully employ Ukraine's resources and to correctly estimate the resources of the EU and Russia. Thus, during the rapidly developing events of the annexation, Ukraine failed to construct a robust strategy to meet its objectives, which to a certain extent helped Russia to take over the Crimean Peninsula.

My main findings regarding Ukrainian leaders' operation with information about others' preferences is that they did not make full use of the available information and consequently had incomplete awareness of the EU's and Russia's preferences. First, the Euromaidan somehow changed the ruling elites in Ukraine. Although most new leaders were experienced politicians, they needed time to develop their understanding of the crisis situation and to build information channels. Such open Russian aggression was also an extraordinary situation for which Ukrainian leaders lacked crisis management experience. Second, I showed that Russia's core preference was to keep its influence on Ukraine and thus to stop EU-Ukraine integration; although this was understood in Kyiv and Brussels, it was not taken seriously enough. The Crimean Peninsula has strategic importance for Russia, and the country invested enough time and resources in pro-Russian media, organizations, and parties in Crimea starting from the 1990s. A number of my respondents mentioned that these Russian influences in Crimea were not properly addressed by Ukrainian politicians. Moreover, Putin's personal preference—to stay in power—should have been part of the analysis (as he was the main decision maker in Russia and he wanted to boost his popularity among Russians), but this was missed in Kyiv. Last, the EU preferred to have a stable partner in Ukraine and to have no conflicts in its neighborhood, which did not fully correspond to Ukraine's preference of full EU-Ukraine integration. The EU's interest in Ukraine was far smaller than Ukrainian politicians imagined it. Thus, as predicted by the game theory approach, a flawed understanding of others' preferences had a negative effect on the Ukrainians' ability to make rational decisions in foreign policy.

My analysis of trust in EU-Ukraine-Russia relations revealed a few further peculiarities. On one hand, my empirical data suggest that Ukrainian policy makers trusted that Russia would not dare to annex Crimea and rejected information that challenged this understanding. On the other hand, they trusted the EU's ability and willingness to protect Crimea from Russia and to act as a guardian of international law. Trust in the Budapest Memorandum was also high in Ukraine. The EU policy makers had a certain trust in their Ukrainian interlocutors, but there were some instances of uncertainty about the actions of the new government. Additionally, Russia effectively used bluffing (a staged referendum, threats, original denial of the presence of its military in Crimea) during the annexation of Crimea, which deceived both Ukraine and the EU. This unrealistic trust of Ukrainian decision makers (trusting Russia not to attack and the EU to help) is considered by me the biggest issue in their foreign policy analysis during the events in Crimea. Yet this bitter lesson helped Ukrainian decision makers to react to Russia's further aggression faster—an advisor to a senior official in Ukraine explained that when the EU requested Ukraine once again not to provoke Russia already in Donbas, Ukrainians did not follow this and acted differently in Donbas (Int-7 2020).

The estimation of all actors' payoffs by Ukrainian policy makers for this period was overshadowed by their desire to integrate with the EU (and to be less dependent on Russia) and later to preserve Ukraine's territorial integrity. Enthusiasm after the success of Euromaidan created inflated expectations regarding the EU's path for Ukraine and lowered attention to Russia. To pursue its preference to control Ukraine, Russia first hoped that the February 21 agreement would save the situation after Euromaidan, and this was not taken into account by either Ukraine or the

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EU. Ukrainian decision makers did not look at Russia's further payoffs, which were to stop Ukraine from forging closer ties with the EU and to boost domestic support for Putin via the annexation of Crimea. The EU's payoff for the preservation of international rule of law was considered too high, whereas the EU's actual preferred payoffs were to avoid an outbreak of an open war in Ukraine and to sign the Association Agreement with Ukraine. Ukrainian policy makers confirmed that the EU promised to solve the situation in Crimea, but according to EU officials the Union viewed itself rather as a mediator, not a party to the conflict. Much of these peculiarities of the structure of payoffs and their formation might have been missed by Ukrainian decision makers.

The study of the EU's, Russia's, and Ukraine's resources and their readiness to use them makes the situation even clearer. As confirmed by both independent observers and actual decision makers, Ukraine lacked the necessary resources to protect Crimea from Russia by military means. Russia's military groupings on the peninsula were incomparably larger, and several acts of defections of Ukrainian security services to Russia also happened in Crimea. Additionally, the new leaders in Kyiv were not ready to rule the country in such stormy times and they also failed in reaching out to ordinary Crimeans, some of whom were Russian oriented (after years of Russian influences on the peninsula). Russia was ready to invest much of its vast resources into this operation, and the EU was not prepared to use its resources to save Crimea. In addition to its greater willingness and more powerful military, Russia had another advantage—time. Ukrainian decision makers could somehow estimate Russia's resources but did not know what Russia was ready to do in Ukraine. Their awareness of the EU's abilities was even poorer due to a misunderstanding of the EU's foreign policy. Thus, Ukraine's own resources were not fully used (the lack of political will to protect the country, a missed opportunity to involve civil society and reach out to Crimeans), and the resources of others were not correctly estimated by the Ukrainian leaders.

In this way, a number of factors acted against Ukraine and favored Russia during the annexation of Crimea. Certain issues prevented Ukrainian decision makers from performing a proper strategic foreign policy analysis with a realistic awareness of their own and their opponents' strategies, which is fundamental to any country's success in its foreign relations. Russia did not stop with the annexation of Crimea and fueled the war in Donbas in spring 2014 and started a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Ukrainian leaders had to deal with these next challenges. Yet the Crimean annexation acted as the first step of Russian aggression and served a lesson for policy makers in Ukraine and the West. Theoretically, the article has provided tools of foreign policy analysis (based on four game theory elements: information, trust, payoffs, and resources), which could be further used both for explanation and development of Ukraine's (or other countries') foreign policy.

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Notes

1 Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. 1995. On the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. 96/95-BP. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/go/95/95-%D0%B2%D1%80.

2 Agreement between the Russian Federation and Ukraine on a Phased Settlement of the Black Sea Fleet Problem of April 15, 1994, http://docs.cntd.ru/document/901778482.

3 In his interview in November 2014, Putin harshly criticized that Polish, German and French foreign ministers put their signatures on the agreement of February 21 and later supported 'the coup d'état' in Ukraine (Seipel 2014).

4 Ukraine, Russian Federation. 1997. Agreement between Ukraine and the Russian Federation on the status and conditions of the stationing of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/go/643_076.

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5 Only on March 18 (after the referendum on March 16), the Prime Minister of Ukraine recorded an appeal to Ukrainians in which he promised not to cancel the language law, to begin decentralization, and to preserve good relations with Russia (Yatseniuk 2014). This was already too late.
6 Russia named the film a documentary, although the vast part of it consisted of Russian propaganda.
7 The meeting of signatories of the Budapest Memorandum took place on March 4–5, 2014, in Paris (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine 2014). However, consultations with the UK and the US did not result in anything but declarations of Ukraine's territorial integrity (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine 2014) and Ukrainian representatives did not have a chance to meet with those from Russia (Int-36 2021).

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