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# UKRAINE'S EXTERNAL ECONOMIC DEPENDENCIES AND THE STRUGGLE TOWARDS POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE

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## ABSTRACT

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Following the breakdown of the USSR, the post-Soviet states underwent a rocky transition period which has been met with conflict and a tug-of-war between the west and Russia over the Eastern European nations. With the establishment of NATO and the EU's expansion towards the east, tensions between both regions once again arose, as Russia began feeling a threat from the west through its integration tactics, and the east feared further Russian influence and intervention within the post-Soviet states.

Since the early 2000s, Ukraine experienced an economic and political shift from Russia towards the EU, due to civil unrest over Russian intervention in eastern and southern Ukraine and its national government. Following the attempted 2014 signing of the trade and political agreement with the European Union, known as the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, Russia feared further western expansion and increased its military forces within the country. These internal tensions consequently resulted in the annexation of Crimea and the Maiden Revolution which would start a domino effect of conflicts later to come in Ukraine.

With the 2019 Ukrainian election of President Volodymyr Zelensky, his national government campaigned on a platform of anticorruption, economic renewal, and peace in the Donbas region. Zelensky's win indicated the public's deep dissatisfaction with the political establishment and its struggle against corruption and an oligarchic economy. Nevertheless, despite the national governments' determination for NATO and EU membership, recent polls in the country indicated that public opinion remained mixed and a political divide in Ukraine was evident,<sup>1</sup> given the "either/or" decision its nation was confronted with: stronger economic and political ties with Russia, or the EU?

Therefore, this thesis will examine the postcolonial theory and how Ukraine's experience following its independence from the USSR as a postcolonial state, resulted in its government switching alliances from Russia towards the west, igniting a domino effect of political, economic, and military ramifications.

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<sup>1</sup> Masters, 2021

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## ABBREVIATIONS

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AA	The Association Agreement
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
DNR	Donetsk People's Republic
EACU	Eurasian Customs Union
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
LNR	Lugansk People's Republic
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OHCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
US	The United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO	World Trade Organization

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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With the emergence of globalization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, economic and political competition between states amplified, generating a multipolar world of strong states competing against one another for power. However, with the divide between developed economies, transitioning economies, and developing economies, weaker states seek to bandwagon off of stronger and more developed states by aligning their political and economic interests to survive in the competitive world market and international political arena. Due to developing and transitioning economies having unstable institutions, political instability, weak national economic policies, poor infrastructure, and outdated technology, the likelihood of foreign investors establishing businesses in these states diminishes, which subsequently hampers their economic growth and sustainability. This results in the dependency on international actors, such as international organizations and foreign governments for financial aid; assistance in state-building practices, institutional reforms, and economic growth; international intervention during times of war; and economic and political unions and agreements.

A historical characteristic developing and transitioning economies commonly share in their struggle towards economic and political independency, is their history of colonialism. In the aftermath of colonialism, the cultures of postcolonial nations experience the dichotomies between the longing for autonomy yet their history of dependence; the desire for autochthony yet the reality of their colonial origin; the determination in resistance from the former colonizer yet also the need for complicity; and the urge for cultural, social, institutional, and political originality, yet the possibility of imitation.<sup>2</sup> These characteristics and dichotomies of developing and transitioning economies are embodied within the theory of postcolonialism, which focuses on the political dependency former colonized nations have on their former colonizers. Moreover, postcolonialism addresses the methods of oppression and coercive domination which occur within the contemporary world such as the politics of anti-colonialism

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<sup>2</sup> Moore, 2001, p.112

and neocolonialism, race, gender, nationalisms, class, regions, and ethnicities.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the cross-cultural outcome between the host state and former colonizers historical method of domination, consists of mutual constitution that is permanently tainted by its colonial past.<sup>4</sup>

Regions which are frequently exemplified within postcolonialism that have been colonized by western nations throughout history include the Africa, South America, Asia, and even North America. Yet, a region seldom addressed within the theory that, too, was colonized by a hegemonic actor, and which continuously endures external intervention and influences to this day, is Eastern Europe. During the Cold War and following the fall of the USSR, this region experienced a political “tug-of-war” between the East and West, most particularly between the USSR (and present-day Russia), in addition to international organizations, particularly the EU intervening in this regions’ political and economic affairs. Through intervention and economic and political agreements, these powerful actors sought to develop influence within Eastern Europe to maintain their sphere of influence within the region and prevent another hegemonic actor from gaining more power.

A prime illustration of an Eastern European state which resembles the characteristics as a postcolonial country politically dependent on external actors, is Ukraine. Since its independence from the USSR in 1991, the integration process of Ukraine either towards the West or East has been influenced by foreign intervention and its lack of clear domestic economic strategy. The conundrum of Ukraine’s economic and political orientation - the “either/or” approach pursued by both Russia versus the EU - has incited the conflict in and over Ukraine<sup>5</sup>, resulting in tensions between itself and the two external actors. Due to Ukraine’s recent history of colonization with the USSR, their current complex and troublesome relationship culminated in territorial disputes and political discrepancies, which has stoked tensions between both states up until today. The three most significant territorial disputes which are ongoing and are a result of Ukraine’s colonial past with Russia is exemplified in the

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<sup>3</sup> Young, 2016, p.11

<sup>4</sup> Zein-Elabdin, 2009, p.1159

<sup>5</sup> Adarov et al., 2015, p.32

breakaway territories of the DNR and LNR in eastern Ukraine, and the Republic of Crimea, the annexed territory by Russia in Ukraine's southern peninsula. As pro-Russian territories, these three regions split from Ukraine in 2014, following the 2013-2014 social protests and ensuing pro-Russian unrest throughout Kiev over Ukraine's decision to abstain from the 2014 EU Association Agreement, known as the Maiden Revolution.

One of the Western strategies to pry Ukraine away from Russia has been its attempts at spreading Western values and promoting democracy in Ukraine and other post-Soviet states. These efforts frequently involve financing pro-Western individuals and organizations, which is exemplified within one of the West's largest organizations, the European Union. The EU, like NATO, has been expanding eastward into the post-Soviet sphere, but with its determination to develop a wider economic and political union consisting of Western values and ideologies. In May 2008, the EU established the Eastern Partnership Initiative, which aims to promote prosperity in post-Soviet states, such as Ukraine, and integrate them into the EU's economic bloc.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, with Ukraine's signing of the 2016 AA/DCFTA trade agreement with the EU has disrupted recent economic and trade relations with Russia, as Ukraine's national government shifted its political dependency and economic attention towards the European Union. Between Ukraine and Russia, mutual trade, investment and travel embargoes, and energy price disputes may have been affected due to Ukraine's stronger ties with the EU, yet Russia still remains as one of largest trading partners. With the AA/DCFTA, the agreement is aimed at increasing trade in goods and services between both actors by reducing tariffs and aligning Ukraine's rules in line with the EU's industrial sectors and agricultural products. This agreement's central purpose is to not only improve economic relations between the EU and Ukraine, but also to promote deeper political ties and respect for common values. Within this agreement, the EU banned the import of goods deriving from Crimea and Sevastopol, in addition to investments and several directly related services in both regions as the EU views Russia's annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol as illegal.<sup>7</sup> Since the Ukrainian revolution and the subsequent political crisis, the EU has been one of the largest humanitarian donors in the

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<sup>6</sup> Mearsheimer, 2014, p.79-80

<sup>7</sup> European Commission, 2021, "Ukraine"

eastern Ukraine, providing €141.8 million in emergency financial assistance, with €23 million in 2019 alone.<sup>8</sup> However, from Kremlin's perspective, the EU's intention to integrate states and expand eastward, such as Ukraine, is merely another tactic the West develops, like NATO, to corner Russia and threaten its national interests.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, the objective of this thesis is to examine Ukraine's postcolonial development after its independence from the USSR, through its current political relations, internal conflicts, and bilateral economic policies and agreements between Ukraine and its two main external dependencies, Russia and the EU. The research question to this thesis will thus inquire:

**How has Ukraine's economic relations with external actors affected its political independence?**

Thereupon, the analysis chapter of this thesis will argue the following three points:

1. As exemplified within the postcolonial theory, Ukraine's historical relationship with the Soviet Union as a former colonized state has resulted the state to become economically and politically dependent on Russia following its independence. Examples of Russia's former colonial influence is evident in the breakaway regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, and Crimea, and the ongoing violent conflicts. Within postcolonialism, it emphasizes that a colonial power (namely the USSR) which once colonized a state (namely Ukraine) can have lasting conflicts, due to the deep cultural and political assimilation caused by colonization;

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<sup>8</sup> Bentzen, 2020. "Ukraine: The Minsk agreements five years on"; Adarov et al., 2015, p.32; European Commission, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Mearsheimer, 2014, p.79



2. Yet, due to these same territorial disputes and violent conflicts in Donetsk, Luhansk, and Crimea, in addition to revolution and current war in its country, Ukraine is shifting its economic and political dependency from Russia towards the EU. This is evident in the EU's recent integration and economic strategies of the AA/DCFTA with Ukraine, in addition to the increase of imports and exports between both actors, while the imports and exports between Ukraine and Russia has diminished, even prior to the current war in Ukraine;
3. Thus, a political tug-of-war between the East (Russia) and the West (the EU) has ensued over Ukraine, with a shift from its political and economic dependency from Russia, towards a political and economic dependency on the EU. Nevertheless, despite the current Ukrainian government being more pro-West, Eastern and Southern Ukraine is predominantly pro-East, resulting in Ukraine's inability to remain a stable and politically independent nation.

In relation to the three abovementioned points, it is imperative to note that this thesis is not indicating that the US is not involved in Ukraine's economic and political shift towards the West, as another hegemonic western power conducting its sphere of influence within NATO as a classic adversary to Russia. Rather, this thesis intends to highlight the EU's extensive impact in Ukraine's new economic and political dependency towards the West as another western hegemonic power, that due its determination in establishing the DCFTA between itself and Ukraine, has contributed towards the tensions between Russia and the West. Moreover, as a new economic agreement between Ukraine and the EU which undoubtedly has political undertones, it is essential to address the economic and political drawbacks which has ensued as a result of the DCFTA and between the three actors.

Therefore, the structure of this thesis is the following: the Methodology which will outline the theoretical inspiration of the thesis, the methods of data collection that were applied, and lastly the literature review. In chapter 3, a historical background of Ukraine's economic and political history with Russia will be outlined following its fall from the USSR.

Within that chapter, we will take a closer look into how various international conflicts emerged throughout Ukraine, beginning from the early 2000s to present-day. Chapter 4 will thus go in address theory of postcolonialism, starting with its central arguments, the cultural impacts of post colonialism in the former colonized state, and the limits of the theory. This section is essential in order to showcase afterwards in the analysis the various ways Ukraine is a postcolonial state, how it is shifting its dependencies from Russia, and shifting them towards the EU instead. Thus, the analysis will argue the three aforementioned points of this paper, and combine both quantitative and qualitative data, indicating Ukraine's economic and political shift from Russia towards the EU.

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## 2. METHODOLOGY

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Within the following section, an overview will be provided to address the theoretical inspiration, methods of data collection, and literature review, to provide a brief overview of the research phase of this thesis.

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### THE THEORETICAL INSPIRATION

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The research approach was performed deductively with the intention of analyzing if an existing theory (postcolonial theory) can be applied to a region (Eastern Europe) overlooked within that same theory. The initial inspiration behind this thesis was developed due to interest in the political history of Europe during the Cold War, and the behaviors of hegemonic states and their sphere of influences, specifically the US and USSR. To narrow down such as vast region, Eastern Europe was first selected to examine, due to the region's perpetual international involvement and intervention from external actors, which persists today after the fall of the USSR. Moreover, it came to the attention that despite this region's economic and political development in the past decades, it still relies on external actors to help reform its

internal institutions, improve its domestic markets, develop trade relations, intervene in internal territorial disputes or ethnic conflicts, and so forth. The main element that became noticeable in this regions' struggle for economic and political stability, was the evident aspect that the USSR had colonized parts of this region, as well as parts of central Asia. Colonization is more frequently discussed and analyzed in regard to European and American colonization in South America, Africa, and Asia, which indubitably had devastating impacts that has affected many states today, but rarely is the Western state-upon-Western state colonization analyzed, and especially the notion that the USSR had indeed colonized the states which became part of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the idea to examine postcolonialism in relation to the USSR and present-day Russia was developed, by applying the postcolonial theory.

It became quite evident during the research phase of the postcolonialism theory that less attention was focused on the USSR and Ukraine. This is due to two main factors: firstly, postcolonialism is a rather new theory which evolved a few decades ago and is now generating more discussions, in comparison to other international relations or political science theories which have been analyzed and examined repeatedly by scholars and experts (such as realism or liberalism). Secondly, within the postcolonial scholarship itself, the USSR as a colonial empire is less discussed rather than the more "traditional colonizers", namely nations in Europe or North America which colonized other nations in South America, Africa, and Asia. Therefore, one of the main motivations of this thesis is to add towards the discourse of postcolonialism by exemplifying the USSR as the former colonizer and Ukraine as the colonized, by examining the contemporary relationships between Russia and Ukraine following the fall of the USSR.

What was found interesting about this theory is that postcolonial theory argues that former colonized states become politically dependent on their former colonizers, due to the cultural, economic, political, and social influences of the postcolonizer that once dominated that state. Thus, in order to narrow down this thesis, it was imperative to select a state which was once part of the USSR and is still largely politically and economically dependent on present-day Russia, experiences external intervention and influences, has current internal disputes as result of its postcolonial history, and is struggling to remain economically and politically independent because of the aforementioned reasons. The first that came to mind, especially due to its current external interventions and influences from Russia and the EU specifically,

was Ukraine. Due to previous knowledge and experience in this region, selecting Ukraine as a case study to be exemplified within this paper seemed appropriate due to: 1) Ukraine's former history with the USSR; 2) its current territorial disputes in Eastern Ukraine (Donetsk and Luhansk) and in Crimea; and 3) the influence of the European Union through its integration strategies and policies, which had heavily developed since the 2010s. Lastly, being aware of the economic dependencies of Ukraine on EU economic agreements and financial aid in addition to Russian trade relations and their economic assistance to the Ukraine, the point of the departure of this thesis is Ukraine's economic dependency on external actors, specifically Russia and the EU, which has had the largest influence in the country. From this point, the research question was developed:

**How has Ukraine's economic dependence on external actors affected its political independence?**

The benefit of performing a single case study, is the opportunity to dive deeper into one single state and examine the cause and effect of its former history which may have a strong correlation to its contemporary issues. Thus, by examining Ukraine's economic and political histories with Russia and EU following its independence from the USSR, we can take a closer look and determine that indeed Ukraine was colonized by the USSR, which has simultaneously led to its political dependencies on Russia and the EU, causing internal divisions and conflicts. Furthermore, due to Ukraine's internal conflicts and the war with Russia being a contemporary issue, there was certainly a vast amount of data available throughout the various databases, newspapers, and statistical websites to include within this thesis. Initially, the objective of this thesis was to apply other Eastern European states with breakaway regions similar to Ukraine within one study, for example Moldova, as an additional case study to compare and contrast. However, then the result of the study may conclude that Ukraine was a "more colonized" and more effected than Moldova, due to Russia's greater concern for Ukraine and its three breakaway regions, as opposed to Moldova and its breakaway region of Transnistria. Therefore, it was not necessarily the case that "more is better" in analyzing the effects of

postcolonialism and developing a generalization on all former post-Soviet states, with or without breakaway nations and a large ethnic Russian population. This type of study would need to go more in depth and performed in a much larger scale.

## METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

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The method of data collection during the research phase was both a quantitative and qualitative research, due to the central themes of this thesis focusing on economics, history, theory, and international relations. The sources applied consisted primarily of secondary sources such as scholarly articles, journals, books, reports, and newspapers. It was imperative to apply both quantitative and qualitative data, in order to provide a diverse set of data within the historical background, theoretical framework, and analysis chapters of this thesis. Due to the analysis of this thesis revolving around postcolonial theory, postcolonialism and the USSR, and Ukraine's history after its independence from the USSR, the majority of data found were qualitative, secondary sources. This is primarily because this section of the research is purely theoretical and historical, which is generally secondary sources. Certainly, with primary, historical sources, one can refer to treaties, agreements, political statements, laws, et cetera, but the intention of this part of the data collection was to get a scholarly or academic overview of postcolonial theory and Ukraine's historical background, rather than provide an analysis on any laws or treaties between the parties. However, despite the majority of the qualitative data being secondary sources, data referring to the AA/DCFTA and Minsk Agreements were extracted from the European Commission's websites, which provided a more direct and comprehensive understanding of the respective agreements, as well as statistical and historical data not mentioned within the agreements. For example, the European Commission's website regarding the AA/DCFTA and Ukraine quickly outlines the year of the signing of the treaty, when it came into effect, brief quantitative data on the trade relations between the EU and

Ukraine since 2017, and the objectives of the agreements.<sup>10</sup> This provides a quick assessment of the two agreements, yet also guides the researcher towards other avenues on the website, such as other primary sources or secondary sources on agreements, statistical data, reports, or general information.

In addition to the European Commission website, the scholarly articles applied to this thesis derived primarily from experts and scholars whose publications were discovered on the University Library at Aalborg University, JSTOR, Research Gate, and Taylor and Francis research databases. The usage of these databases were selected due the abundance of scholarly articles and quantitative and qualitative data that is available which can be peer reviewed by other experts, demonstrating the quality of its sources. Another advantage in these aforementioned databases is the possibility to specifically search for keywords, authors or titles of an article or book. For example, when using “postcolonialism” and “Soviet Union” in the search engine, it became more specific to find specific data within the theory, as opposed to simply using “postcolonialism” during the research phase. As both methods were used, different perspectives on the theory were applied to the theoretical framework of this paper.

The quantitative data used throughout this research were also secondary sources primarily from the websites of the European Commission and House of Commons Library. Due to that the secondary approach to this thesis is partially economic based and referred to specific agreements between the EU and Ukraine, or Ukraine’s overall trade relations, this data was applied within the historical background and analysis of this thesis. Additional quantitative data were found with scholarly articles, which provided brief overviews of trade relations between Ukraine and Russia, and Ukraine and the EU. Nevertheless, the European Commission websites were the most updated quantitative data, in comparison to the scholarly articles. Thus, the most recent quantitative data on the trade relations between the three actors was essential in order to provide an updated and overall analysis of Ukraine’s economic development and relation with Russia and the EU after its independence from the USSR. This aspect was vital for the analysis of this thesis, as outdated quantitative data would depict an

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<sup>10</sup> European Commission, 2021, “Ukraine”

inaccurate overview of Ukraine's economic development, weakening the argument of this paper – its economic shift from Russia towards the EU.

One of the disadvantages while researching and applying data within this thesis, was the obvious aspect that the data extracted derived from predominately English-speaking websites, scholars, databases, newspapers, journals, and books. Indeed, one may find the Russian perspective written in English language, which was attempted within the historical background of this thesis and the various sources applied throughout this entirety of this paper, but more diverse data and perspectives may be available only in the Ukrainian or Russian languages. This could provide an even deeper analysis of this subject matter, and access to primary sources from Ukraine, or Ukrainian and Russian speaking scholars and experts, that may have been overlooked. Therefore, due to the language restrictions, this thesis may naturally contain a more “western perspective” regarding the internal conflicts in Ukraine, Russia's perspective concerning the current war, Crimea, and the Donbas region, and fears of western expansion into the east.

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## THE LITERATURE REVIEW

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While researching quantitative data relating to Ukraine's largest trading partners, and statistics on the imports and exports of goods between Ukraine and Russia, and Ukraine and the EU, a few discoveries and new approaches occurred.

Firstly, due to the time frame of this thesis focusing on the post-Soviet period in Ukraine, it was essential to determine which year the data should first be included within this thesis to provide a clear illustration and analysis of Ukraine's economic changes over time. There was initial concern on providing biased data in the analysis specifically due to in 2004-2005 Ukraine underwent the Orange Revolution, then later in 2013 it experienced the Maiden Revolution, and the change of government also during this time, which certainly had severe economic impacts, especially due to the bans and sanctions Ukraine and Russia enforced against one another. Ultimately, it was decided to apply economic data following 2015 to

showcase how the receipt historical issues in Ukraine transformed its dependencies towards the west.

Secondly, while investigating the European Commission's website on Ukraine, the website clearly states that the European Union is Ukraine's largest trading partner. In regards to an international actor, this is certainly true, but in regards to a single state, according to Trading Economics<sup>11</sup>, China is its largest trading partner (as a state). Therefore, it was vital to double check the data to determine which international actor and state is Ukraine's actual largest trading partner, which varies between exporter and importer, as well as the amount of goods traded. For example, China may be Ukraine's largest exporter, the EU member states, Poland, Germany and Italy accumulate to the EU being Ukraine's largest trading partner, but neither of these states overcome China's economic influence in the state. Therefore, it was essential to provide this difference within the analysis to not disclose an inaccurate illustration of the of Ukraine's economic data.

When researching for qualitative data concerning Ukraine's history, political developments, and economy, it was imperative to find the most recent data to provide an overall assessment of Ukraine's development following its independence from the USSR. This was primarily due to the various historical events which has occurred in Ukraine, involving Russia, the US, and the EU predominately, in addition to the internal conflicts which have occurred over the past twenty years. For example, while searching for scholarly articles on JSTOR and University Library at Aalborg University, many articles from the 1990s and early 2000s were available, but the authors analysis and perspectives of Ukraine may miss the full picture of Ukraine's political developments between the EU and Russia following the Orange and Maiden revolutions, the annexation in Crimea, and current war in Ukraine. For example, Ostep Oduskin's article "The Acceptance of Ukraine to the European Union: Integrating and Disintegrating Factors for the EU" (2001), discusses the negative and positive consequences of Ukrainian integration into the EU. As contemporary and relevant of a discussion this topic is, Oduskin analysis of this subject misses the historical mark of Ukraine by stating "There has been

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<sup>11</sup> Trading Economics, 2022



no civil war and no open ethnic conflict” or regarding the assumption of the Russian fleet stationing in the Black Sea would “leave the Crimea in less than fifteen years.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the majority of the qualitative data used in this thesis is from 2015 and later to provide an overall picture of Ukraine’s political and economic developments.

### 3. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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In this chapter, we will explore a brief history of Ukraine and its former colonizer and political and economic dependency, Russia, beginning from Ukraine’s independence from the USSR to its present-day. This chapter will first illustrate the main political and military conflicts between Ukraine and Russia which gravely affected the Ukrainian-Russian political and economic relationship with the culmination of the Ukrainian Revolution in 2013 and the subsequent breakaway states and territorial disputes in Donetsk, Luhansk, and Crimea. Moreover, a brief overview of the 2022 war in Ukraine will be addressed, in addition to Russia’s perspective regarding supporting the DNR and LNR, the annexation of Crimea, and its justifications on invading Ukraine. This section is intended to highlight the historical conflicts Ukraine has undergone since its independence from the USSR, which is still prevalent today. With these major recent historical events, the analysis of this thesis will further exemplify the ongoing tug-of-war over Ukraine between Russia and the EU, with the EU’s implementation of economic, political and security policies to further integrate Ukraine into the west.

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<sup>12</sup> Oduskin, 2001, p.371-375

In 1954, former Soviet Leader Nikita Khrushchev gave Crimea to Ukraine as a reward for loyalty during the de-Stalinisation process and to mark the 300th anniversary of Ukraine's unification with the Russian empire.<sup>13</sup> Almost forty years later in 1992, Crimea was given the status of an autonomous republic leading to a troublesome era between Ukraine and Russia from 1992 to 1994. In July 1993, the Russian parliament passed a resolution claiming Crimea's largest city, Sevastopol, a federal Russian city which was condemned by the Ukrainian parliament, most Western nations, and the UN Security Council declared the resolution in violation of the UN Charter.<sup>14</sup> Tensions eventually subsided in 1994 when the UK, US, and Russia signed the Budapest Memorandum, that declared its commitment towards the independence, sovereignty, and existing borders of Ukraine.<sup>15</sup>

However, with the 2005 election of Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, the country's most pro-Russian leader since independence since 1991, represented a milestone in Ukraine–Russia relations. Prior to this point, Yanukovich's and Russia's relationship were stable, despite him and the national government being unable to fully comply with Russia's integration agenda, yet they did not also dismiss Russian demands in totality.<sup>16</sup> However in November 2004 until January 2005, two months of mass protests broke out due to corruption and election fraud in favor of Yanukovich as President rather than the actual winner of the election, opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko, which became known as the Orange Revolution. This revolution generated a large shift towards the West, with the desire for a deeper relation with the EU through binding commitments and comprehensive integration. Yushchenko eventually presided as President over Ukraine until 2010, ruling with a pro-Western perspective, but Russia naturally disagreed with Ukraine's European objective, as the

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<sup>13</sup> Kramer, 2014, as cited in Cavandoli, 2016, p.881

<sup>14</sup> European Commission, 1993, as cited in Cavandoli, 2016, p.881

<sup>15</sup> OSCE, Budapest Memorandums on Security Assurances, 1994, as cited in Cavandoli, 2016, p.881

<sup>16</sup> Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2017, p.689

Russian government planned to integrate Ukraine into the Eurasian Customs Union consisting of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, which Ukraine eventually declined to join.<sup>17</sup>

With Yanukovich elected as President in 2010, he found himself in the middle of his own aspirations, Ukraine's domestic issues, and Russian geopolitical ambitions. Following years negotiating with Ukraine, the EU gave Ukraine a November 2013 deadline to sign the EU Association Agreement during the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius. On the same evening of the summit, Russia increased pressure on Ukraine to remain committed to its Russian allies. Yanukovich ultimately rejected the European integration agreement as Ukraine was heavily financially and politically dependent on Moscow. This decision was subsequently the political error Yanukovich made, as events in Kyiv became disastrous for him and his corrupt political allies and elites. The Ukrainian President miscalculated the disappointment of the Ukrainian society, who became provoked by the redirection of their countries policies towards the East, as well as the increasing political activism of the Ukrainian society motivated by the former Orange Revolution.<sup>18</sup>

Yet, following several visits by Russian President Vladimir Putin to Kyiv and Yanukovich to Moscow, the Ukrainian president announced on one week before the Eastern Partnership Summit that Ukraine would not sign the agreement.<sup>19</sup> On 21 November 2013, hundreds of protesters gathered at the Maidan Nezalezhnosti square in Kyiv to demonstrate their support for closer EU integration and cooperation. At first, peaceful demonstrations spread across the entire country, but Yanukovich ultimately lost control of the situation with protesters calling for his resignation and police clashing, resulting to many casualties, and Yanukovich and his government being overthrown. The president afterwards fled during the night of 21 February 2014 from Kyiv, with Russia assisting in his escape first to Crimea and lastly to Russia where he currently lives in exile.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Karatnycky, 2005, p.35-36; Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2016, p.689

<sup>18</sup> Useinov, 2017, p.183-84

<sup>19</sup> Liber, 2017, p.41-42; Useinov, 2017, p.183

<sup>20</sup> Useinov, 2017, p.184

During this chaos amounting in Kyiv, Russian armed special troops invaded the streets of the peninsula, despite the presence of Ukrainian military forces in Crimea. This is partially due to the disarray and disorganization of the Ukrainian army and Ukrainian parliamentary who had leadership following Yanukovich's escape, allowing the Putin a small window of opportunity to annex Crimea. The separatists had also claimed they had received Yanukovich's oral confirmation who was in Russia in exile at the time, and whom they still considered as legitimate president. Ignoring Kyiv's denial to accept his new position as head of Crimea, the leader of the anti-Ukrainian group, Sergei Aksionov, took control of the local Ukrainian security forces on the peninsula and appealed to Putin to provide more military support to assure further peace. The Russian government justified this decision and explained that they could not ignore the Aksionov's request and therefore promised to help him and his supporters in Crimea. Before long, local separatist groups and Russian security forces spread throughout the cities and towns of the peninsula, surrounding airports and various communication centers, and attacking Ukrainian military bases and other strategic facilities in order to disable and commander them.<sup>21</sup> On 16 March 2014, Crimea held a referendum to determine whether the region should re-join Russia as a federal subject or if they wanted to restore the 1992 Crimean constitution as Crimea's status as a part of Ukraine. According to the observers of the Eurasian Observatory for Democracy & Elections, voter turnout reportedly was at a record high. The result revealed that 96.8% of voters were in favor of joining Russia, as reported by the head of the referendum commission. The EU and US immediately rejected the results of Crimea's referendum and announced sanctions against a number of officials from Ukraine and Russia.<sup>22</sup>

In conclusion, the trigger of the Ukrainian crisis was the result the Yanukovich's decision to postpone the signing of the free trade EU Association Agreement, resulting in the Russian invasion of Crimea, a separatist upsurge backed by Russia in eastern Ukraine, and the establishment of a new pro-Western territory in southern Ukraine. This cascaded further in increasing tensions between the EU on one hand, and Russia, on the other, with Ukraine's

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.191-193

<sup>22</sup> BBC, 2014, as cited in Cavandoli, 2016, p.881-882

divided nation in the middle of this political tug-of-war of hegemonic powers and their individual interests.<sup>23</sup>

## THE BREAKAWAY REGIONS OF DONETSK AND LUHANSK

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The two breakaway states Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and the Lugansk People's Republic (LNR) are provinces located in Ukraine's eastern region of Donbass. Both Donetsk and Luhansk were Ukraine's most industrialized region for at least a century, with the coal industry at its center, and Russian as the main language. This gave it not so much a Ukrainian or Russian identity, rather a Soviet identity with little interest in splitting during the breakup of the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup>

In April 2014, pro-Russian separatists began occupying government buildings in the Donbass region as a protest against the government in Kyiv which they deemed illegitimate. These rebels called for a referendum on independence to be enforced in Donetsk and Luhansk and demanded that Russia send peacekeepers to protect them.<sup>25</sup> A snap referenda was thereafter organized and carried out on 11 May 2014, despite Putin's request on the rebels to postpone them. Similar to Crimea's election, a high voter turnout showed that over 90% of voters in both Donetsk and Luhansk voted for political independence from Kyiv. The DNR and LNR were thus declared quasi-independent states by the separatists. Ukraine and the EU strongly criticized and declared the referendum and its results illegal and illegitimate. Nevertheless, Russia's response naturally respected the outcome of the election and called for a peaceful implementation of this transition of power in both regions. After hours of the DNR

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<sup>23</sup> Liber, 2017, p.41-42; Useinov, 2017, p.183-184

<sup>24</sup> De Waal, 2018, p.62-63

<sup>25</sup> BBC, 2014, as cited in Cavandoli, 2017, p.883

declaring itself independent, it asked to join the Russian Federation insisting Moscow to listen to the will of the people, but the votes were recognized by no government, including Russia.<sup>26</sup>

In the early months following the referendum, an alliance of Russian nationalist radicals and locals led the activism and fighting throughout the region. A general assumption within Ukraine and the Western nations believed that Moscow was behind these rebellions. This assumption came about as many believed that the rebellion would have had little chance of success if the Russian government had not directly intervened in the summer of 2014, when it first sent weapons and troops into the conflict zone.<sup>27</sup> However, in September 2014 and February 2015, a ceasefire agreement and a special status agreement for Donbas between signed, between Ukraine, Russia, and the OSCE, known as the Minsk Agreements.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the success these two states may have accomplished as being semi-independent entities, both leaders within the DNR and LNR are aware that Moscow deems them as less essential in comparison to Russia's other geopolitical issues (such as Crimea). This has subsequently left them feeling uncertain about the future of their respective breakaway territories and their current positions within their states. Both leaders of the regions admit their role is very circumscribed especially during decision-making processes, in which Moscow completely excludes them from. Donetsk has especially admitted to their total dependence on Russia despite publicly stating that Moscow's political and military influence over the breakaway state is minimal, in which they must continuously balance the desires of their citizens and the top political powers in Russia.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Russian News Agency, 2014; Al Jazeera. (12 May 2014).; The Guardian, 2014; as cited in Cavandoli, 2017, p.883

<sup>27</sup> De Waal, 2018, p.63-64

<sup>28</sup> Bentzen, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> International Crisis Group, 2014; Fontanka , 2015, as cited in International Crisis Group, 2016

In January 2021, current President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskiy appealed to US President Joe Biden in allowing Ukraine to join NATO, over growing fears of Russian troops near the Ukrainian borders, in which Russia claimed were only military training exercises. With NATO troops already positioned throughout Eastern Europe, Russia presents security demands in December 2021 requesting NATO to withdraw its troops and weapons from the region and deny Ukraine from ever joining the alliance.<sup>30</sup> In early November 2021, Russia once again stationed additional military forces along the Ukrainian borders, with over 100,000 Russian military personnel and assets sent to Crimea and the Voronezh, Kursk and Bryansk regions of western Russia. Moreover, additional Russian forces were deployed to Belarus for further military exercises close to the Ukrainian border, and the Russian naval forces were moved from the Baltic and Northern fleets into the Black Sea. Tensions hereafter heightened following a US intelligence assessment the following month, which indicated that Russia may be planning an invasion into Ukraine by early 2022.<sup>31</sup>

On 24 January 2022, NATO orders its military on standby and increases the placement of more ships and fighter jets in eastern Europe. Two days later, the US counters Russia's security demands by reiterating NATO's commitment to its "open-door" policy while offering Russia a "pragmatic evaluation" of Moscow's security and military concerns of NATO expansion, with Russia later responding that its security demands were ignored. The following month, due to growing Western fears over Russia invading Ukraine, the US deploys 3,000 troops to Poland and Romania while affirming they will not send troops to Ukraine, but threat of severe economic sanctions to Russia if Putin takes military action. On the 21 February, Putin orders peacekeeping forces into the DNR and LNR, after recognizing them as independent, pro-Russian states. The following day, the US, UK and their allies' sanction Russian parliament members, banks, and other assets in retaliation to Putin's troop order, with Germany

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<sup>30</sup> Aloisi and Daniel, 2022

<sup>31</sup> Walker, 2022

suspending the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project from Russia. On 24 February 2022 in an early morning address on Russian television, Putin announces Russian forces will perform “a special military operation” in Ukraine, with Russian forces invading from Belarus in the north, Russia in the east, and Crimea in the south. President Zelensky introduces martial law, decrees a full military mobilization of all men aged 18-60 to join the war and forbid from leaving Ukraine, and closes its nations airspace.<sup>32</sup>

According to the OHCHR, from the onset of this war, a recorded 4,577 civilian casualties in the country have occurred, with 1,964 killed and 2,613 injured. Nevertheless, the OHCHR believes that the actual statistics are considerably higher, as the acquiring of data from certain locations where intense hostilities have been ongoing has been delayed and are still pending.<sup>33</sup> The invasion of Ukraine has also resulted in over 4.7 million Ukrainians fleeing to mostly neighboring countries, such as in Poland, Romania, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, neither Russia or Ukraine's estimates of Russian and Ukrainian military losses have been independently verified but analysts have advised that Russia may be downplaying its casualty rate, while Ukraine could be inflating it to boost national morale. Western leaders believe that between 7,000 and 15,000 Russian soldiers may have been killed, but the exact number is unknown.<sup>35</sup>

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## THE KREMLIN'S PERSPECTIVE ON UKRAINE

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The Russian perspective on Ukraine is both a complicated and divisive stance which has resulted in decades of territorial disputes, internal conflicts, international agreements, and war. The two central viewpoints the Kremlin holds regarding the “Ukrainian problem” are: that

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<sup>32</sup> Aloisi and Daniel, 2022; Psaropoulos, 2022; Walker, 2022

<sup>33</sup> United Nations, 2022

<sup>34</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022

<sup>35</sup> Al Jazeera, 2022, April 8; BBC, 2022



Ukraine is an ethnic part of Russia and therefore belongs with the Russian Federation, and Ukraine should be protected by any means necessary to prevent further expansion and membership into NATO to safeguard the Russian Federation against the West.

With the first viewpoint, the annexation and breakaway of Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk was justified by Russia under three main reasons. Firstly, that the Russia was protecting Ukraine's ethnic Russian population within these regions, despite it disregarding Ukraine's territorial sovereignty by sending armed forces to Crimea.<sup>36</sup> As expressed within his televised address on 21 February 2022, Putin states:

I would like to emphasise again that Ukraine is not just a neighbouring country for us. It is an inalienable part of our own history, culture and spiritual space. These are our comrades, those dearest to us – not only colleagues, friends and people who once served together, but also relatives, people bound by blood, by family ties.<sup>37</sup>

Secondly, Russia recognized the three breakaway states' declarations of independence as valid forms of their independence from Ukraine, despite the separation violating the Ukrainian constitution. Putin believed the actions of the Crimean people fell well within their right to self-determination and did not understand the international community's, and most especially the West's, unwillingness to accept this argument but accept Kosovo's separation from Serbia. Lastly, he demanded that the international community recognize Crimea's right to self-determination and referred to the mutual cultural heritage the people of south-eastern Ukraine and Russia shared. Moreover, Crimea's historical and civilizational importance to

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<sup>36</sup> Cavandoli, 2016, p.885.

<sup>37</sup> Putin, February 2022

Russia was justification for the reunification into the Russian Federation due to the historical injustice of its handover sixty years earlier to Ukraine by Khrushchev.<sup>38</sup>

The second perspective which Putin and his supporters have predominate concern over is the spread of the west further into the east through the enlargement of more states into NATO. On 3 April 2008 at the Bucharest Summit Declaration in Bucharest, Romania, NATO announced its invitation to Ukraine and Georgia to join the Western alliance as member states.<sup>39</sup> George W. Bush's administration supported this enlargement, but France and Germany opposed this move in fear of further antagonizing Russia and it resulting in severe economic damage within the EU. But eventually NATO's members agreed to no formal process resulting to NATO membership, but instead issued a statement endorsing Georgia and Ukraine to join the alliance and directly stating "These countries will become members of NATO."<sup>40</sup> Unsurprisingly, Russia's reaction towards this announcement was negative, as a famous claim was made between former President of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev and former US President George Bush in 1990 at the signing of Two Plus Four Treaty regarding to Germany's reunification, in which the US promised the Soviet Union no further NATO enlargement into the east. Thirty years later, Putin and many of his supporters believed the US broke their oath to stop NATO enlargement, and the US claims they never promised a cease in NATO enlargement.<sup>41</sup> Once again in Putin's televised addressed on 21 February 2022 he states:

In 1990, when German unification was discussed, the United States promised the Soviet leadership that NATO jurisdiction or military presence will not expand one inch to the east and that the unification of Germany will not lead to the spread of NATO's military organization to the east. This is a quote.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Cavandoli, 2016, p.885-886; Putin, 2014

<sup>39</sup> NATO, 2008

<sup>40</sup> Mearsheimer, 2014, p.78-79

<sup>41</sup> Wiegrefe, 2022 ; Neal, 2022.

<sup>42</sup> Putin, 2022

For the Russian President, the overthrow of Ukraine's democratically elected and pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich was the breaking point. With Yanukovich's flee to Russia and the reinstalment of a new pro-Western and pro-NATO government in Kyiv, Putin became determined to take Crimea, a peninsula which he feared would one-day contain a NATO naval base, and work towards the destabilization of Ukraine until it surrenders its efforts to join the West.<sup>43</sup> In Putin's perspective, Ukraine is the state which links colonization and decolonization as a determination for conquest, connected and justified by a global hegemonic resistance from the west. Putin uses both traditional colonial rhetoric to justify a traditionally colonial war against Ukraine, whilst also claiming the war is a representation of resistance to the international American and Western conspiracy.<sup>44</sup>

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#### 4. THE POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

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As the main argument of this thesis focuses on Ukraine's political dependencies as a result of its economic dependencies as a former colonized state, it is imperative to tackle the main concepts of the postcolonialist theory in order to evaluate Ukraine's political dependencies. Thereupon, this chapter will address the central arguments and also limits as a new theory, and exemplify in the analysis, how Ukraine shifted its dependencies towards the west due to its recent territorial disputes and conflicts with Russia.

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#### CENTRAL ARGUMENTS

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<sup>43</sup> Mearsheimer, 2014, p.77

<sup>44</sup> Snyder, 2015, p.705

Postcolonial theory simultaneously critiques and repels the traditional Western theoretical approaches, such as liberalism, realism, constructivism, by undertaking the anti-colonization perspective. Its central arguments encompass anti-colonial conflicts, emancipation, gender, ethnicity, and class, which are all essential elements for liberation from the nationalist and bourgeois, dominant group. Therefore, postcolonialism is the product of the clash of cultures<sup>45</sup>, and should be viewed together in chronological and epistemological terms, in which it centralizes on issues essential to the formation of a global order after the creation of a new empire.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the postcolonial theory aims to understand the modern world, to which the culture of European modernity (i.e. the nation-state, market system, urban agglomeration) has historical and geographical roots that has overlapped and intertwined with other cultures in deep and complex forms, partially due to colonialism. This understanding may potentially allow developing and transitioning economies to equally participate in the meaning and definitions of economic being and becoming.<sup>47</sup>

As the heterogeneity of the developing and transitioning economies advance in the beginning of the 21st century, likewise did the social polarizations change to that of the colonial era. This occurred during the neoliberal emergence in the western world, in which the social polarization between the developed economies and developing and transitioning economies widened, even within their own nations. Thus, this uneven capitalist global society is one of fundamental factors in the postcolonial world, in which this theory attempts to conceptualize the conditions of the changing forms of a postcolonial hegemonic world.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, it is a dialectical concept that highlights the historical facts of decolonization and questions the theory of sovereignty, as well as the realities of states and ethnic groups emerging into a new imperialistic context of economic and political domination.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Young, 2016, p.10

<sup>46</sup> Quayson, 2000, p.11, as cited in Chernetsky, 2003, p.33

<sup>47</sup> Zein-Elabdin, 2009, p.1154

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.1117

<sup>49</sup> Young, 2016, p.57

In postcolonial theory, it exemplifies how the aftermath of colonialism is still evident in Western cultural imperialism and Eurocentrism. This is due to that the remains of an empire can still influence the formerly colonized states, as much as the colonizing empires themselves, due to the symbiotic relationships between the former colonizers and the former colonized. As a result, a “reverse colonization” occurs,<sup>50</sup> due to the cultural and political impact the former colonizer has had on the colonized, as the dominate cultural and political systems became imbedded and replaced within the colonized nation. Thus, the postcolonial approach critiques Eurocentrism as its central task. This is due that since postcolonialism rejects master narratives, and one of the most powerful contemporary master narratives is the post-Enlightenment, European understanding of history, this theory rejects the cultural and historical hegemony of Eurocentrism.<sup>51</sup>

From a postcolonial perspective, colonial hegemonies perceive the colonized cultures and populations as different than their level of development and norm of modernity. Whether or not the colonial hegemonies believe the modernity in the colonized nation can be achieved, it nevertheless portrays the colonizers superior viewpoint of their culture and peoples, over the inferior level of underdeveloped and unmodernized population of the colonized. For this reason, another aim of the postcolonial approach is to dispute the cultural representations of the “other”. This is done by conceptualizing the historical and social context of the definition of “others”, then exposing the traditional assumptions of ethnicity, gender, and class, and replacing them with alternative ones.<sup>52</sup> Simply put, this theory challenges the different ways how we envision different social groups and utilizes our culturally constructed perceptions, to develop and recreate a different narrative for the minority social and cultural groups.

Moreover, development may be viewed as a colonial discourse through three dimensions. Firstly, the development discourse fixates on the differences between two groups’ or nations’ economies. For example, when the cultural distinctions are replaced by the

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<sup>50</sup> Burney, 2012, p.174

<sup>51</sup> Dirlik, 1994, p.334

<sup>52</sup> Kayatekin, p.1114

measuring of certain data (i.e the life expectancy rate, literacy rate, income, etc.) as the primary criterion to differentiate the colonized culture from the colonizers. Secondly, creating a “problem group” in which describe the “problems” of a certain cultural or ethnic group is dissected and defined based upon stereotypical knowledge. Thirdly, the colonialist’s intervention is justified based on deducing the other group as the “degenerate”, “uncivilized” or “inferior” group. Their inferiority and “otherness” is not defined by the stereotypical colonial perspectives of savagery and cannibalism, rather the developmentalist viewpoint of poverty and illiteracy, as a result of the colonial era effectively reinforcing a cultural hegemony over developing and transitioning economies.<sup>53</sup>

One of the main limits of the postcolonialism approach is the lack of the postcolonial and post-Soviet discourse. In postcolonialism, which has already been examined, the criticism and observation of colonialism and postcolonialism usually pertains to the former European colonization within South America, Africa, Asia, and North America, but rarely “European-on-European” imperialism. Moore (2001) further expresses the gap within the postcolonial and post-Soviet discourse:

In view of these postcolonial-post-Soviet parallels, two silences are striking. The first is the silence of postcolonial studies today on the subject of the former Soviet sphere. And the second, mirrored silence is the failure of scholars specializing in the formerly Soviet-controlled lands to think of their regions in the useful if by no means perfect postcolonial terms developed by scholars of, say, Indonesia and Gabon. For does not the description of postcoloniality offered here reasonably as well apply to the giant crescent from Estonia to Kazakhstan, which also includes (it is worth mentioning all twenty-seven nations) Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the former East Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the remaining Yugoslavia, Macedonia, Albania, Romania, Bulgaria, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan?<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Escobar (1995); Bhaba (1994), as cited in Zein-Elabdin, 2009, p.1159-60

<sup>54</sup> Moore, 2001, p.116

## 5. THE ANALYSIS

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Within this analysis, this chapter will highlight the three major points aforementioned within the introduction of this thesis:

1. Ukraine as a postcolonial state due to its colonization by the Soviet Union. The current conflicts occurring within country, specifically in the pro-Russian territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, and Crimea, is due to the USSR (currently Russia's) cultural and political influence due to its colonial legacy and grasp still on Ukraine;
2. Due to the territorial disputes and violent conflicts in Donetsk, Luhansk, and Crimea in addition to the Orange Revolution and Maiden Revolution, in addition to the current war in Ukraine, it is shifting its economic and political dependency away from Russia, resulting in a decrease in imports and exports between both actors, and a diminishing in mutual agreements and policies, even prior to the current war in Ukraine; and
3. Thus, Ukraine is shifting its economic and political dependency towards the West, specifically the EU. This is evident in the EU's recent integration and economic strategies of the AA/DCFTA with Ukraine, which is causing an increase of imports and exports between both actors for greater European integration.

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### UKRAINE AS A POSTCOLONIAL STATE AND THE USSR AS THE FORMER COLONIZER

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The USSR's colonization over Ukraine has had a lasting impact not only on Ukraine's history, but its cultural and national identity. The discourse surrounding identity in Ukraine is usually met with divide between separation of the ethnic Ukrainians to the ethnic Russian population, in which the Russian population is perceived as superior to the Ukrainians. Several scholars have indicated that there exists two national narratives within Ukraine due to its colonial heritage. Firstly, there exists an Eastern Slavic national identity complex is composed

of the belief in a common heritage and culture of both Ukrainians and Russians. This national narrative supports close relations with Russia and the integration of Russian culture in Ukraine, in which the national legislation promotes equal status to both Ukrainian and Russian language and culture. On the other hand, the ethnic Ukrainian national identity incorporates a perspective that the nation is based upon an ethnic Ukrainian core, and thus there should be a dominant ethnic Ukrainian culture and language.<sup>55</sup>

However, with however with Ukraine being colonized for most of the past Millennium, it has not been regarded as a historical nation in comparison to historically sovereign nations. Due to the long colonial history and suppression of Ukrainian culture by the Russian empire, the relationship between Ukraine and Russia can be compared to the relationship between the English domination in Ireland. Similar to the Irish, the Ukrainian culture has been looked down upon by Russians, as the English looked at the Irish as inferior, such as through Ukrainian foods, songs, and dance, which diminishes the national culture by a dominant culture, or the colonial culture, in the case of Russia. Similar to the Irish culture, the Ukrainian culture and people do not contain the “classic race ingredient” such as the difference in skin color or other physical characteristics, such as Asians or Africans within a predominately Caucasian society. Instead, the possibility of ethnic superiority and dominance of culture by the Russian colonizer is mistakenly undermined due to both ethnic Ukrainians and Russians sharing the same East Slavic ethnicity. Therefore, the possibility of discrimination is frequently overlooked in Ukraine between both ethnic groups, because the supposed ethnic similarity assumes both groups envision one another as equal, and thus no ethnic discrimination between the two groups occurs.<sup>56</sup> Grabowicz (1995) further elaborates that the conditions of Ukraine and other "white" colonies of Russia also endured the same fate of colonial oppression through cultural suppression:

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<sup>55</sup> D'Anieri, 2011); Shulman, 2005, p.59, as cited in Korostelina, 2014, p.272-273

<sup>56</sup> Chernetsky, 2003, p.37



There is a basic qualitative difference: decrees were passed limiting and prohibiting such languages and literatures as Ukrainian and Lithuanian, not Russian. Beyond that, membership in the dominant nation transcended class distinction: a Russian laborer could feel superior to a Ukrainian intellectual simply because the latter was a "*khokhol*"; by itself this is racial discrimination without actually invoking color of skin (although that, of course, was also a factor in both the Russian and the Soviet empire: one need only to recall the contempt for the "*churki*"). And when this becomes a pattern of behavior in the so-called ethnic territories, it is hardly distinguishable from the behavior and values of classical colonialism.<sup>57</sup>

Likewise in Ireland, the Ukrainian ethnic identity was not a guarantee for upward mobility and high political office or leadership unless the "denationalization" of their national identity occurred. This "denationalization of elites" resulted in Ukraine's double cultural oppression: with the classical colonial model coupling with the provincial model, as a semi-autonomous state turned into an ethically submissive state. Grabowicz (1995) further explains:

Provincialization in terms of the loss of quality, narrowing of horizons, distortion of intellectual and artistic production, and so on was accompanied by the more classical features of colonial rule, especially economic exploitation and the reshaping of all indigenous cultural institutions ... In effect, while turning it into a province and thus purportedly a constituent part of a larger administrative whole, the imperial goal was to weaken it, to prevent its resurgence by purposefully stunting its growth and infrastructure... Overarching it all was the general discreditation or, as the Soviet term had it, "deperspectivization" of things Ukrainian - in the scholarly sphere, as well as in every other.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Grabowicz, 1995, p.678, as cited in Chernetsky, 2003, p.38

<sup>58</sup> Grabowicz, 1995, p.678-679, as cited in Chernetsky, 2003, p.38

As a postcolonial entity, the post-Soviet states consequently inherited an inferiority complex resulting in the uncertainty about their own national identities. Even though these states showed various forms of an inferiority complex, known as the “little Russianism” in Ukraine, they connected their national identities to post-colonial identities, such as the “elder brother” Russia, and Slavic or Eurasian identities. Russia is a main external driver in post-communist identity building and has been exporting Eurasian or Eastern Slavic identities to Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Russia also pushes the development of civic identities, through building autocrats' state capacity, and destabilizing democratizing states within the post-Soviet region. The desire to associate themselves to the European identity increased due to EU and NATO regional integration and enlargement policies. Thus, both the EU and Russia influenced the attraction of states undertaking opposite foreign orientations, escalating the uncertainty about national identities.<sup>59</sup>

It is imperative to recognize the role the ethnic Russian territories in eastern and southern Ukraine have also played throughout the recent years. The establishment of the three breakaway territories, DNR, LNR and Crimea, were created to differentiate their ethnic and cultural groups, by “othering” themselves from the ethnic Ukrainians. Due to the former Soviet legacy in Ukraine, and the disconnect they have from the growing Ukrainian culture, the sentiment of “taking back their country” in its former Soviet days influenced the creation of the breakaway states and Russia. For example, Tlostanova (2021) further elaborates:

Many of these groups are postsocialist and postcolonial others at once who will always be excluded from the European/Western/Northern sameness into exteriority, yet due to a colonial-imperial configuration will never be able to belong to any locality —native or acquired. Such groups are often products of a specific Soviet creolization detached

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<sup>59</sup> Chernetsky 2003; Kuzio 1998, 2002; Riabchuk 2002; Kuzio 1998; Franke et al. 2010; Gawrich et al. 2010; Melnykovska & Schweickert 2008, 2009, Aslund & Kuchins 2009; Kagan 2008; Ambrosio 2009; Tolstrup 2009, as cited in Melnykovska et al., p. 1056-7

from any mono-ethnic cultural belongings, born and brought up in the Russian (imperial) linguistic continuum and within the late Soviet intelligentsia culture oriented towards the West. The imperial sameness inside the USSR and Russia has continued to exoticize and demonize them as a colonial other on many levels. Yet the binary opposition of ethnic culture fallen out of time and the modern and progressive dimension which could be only Russian/Soviet or Western/global does not hold anymore.<sup>60</sup>

Furthermore, it is essential to recognize that those who participated in the occupation and violent conflicts that emerged throughout the recent years in Ukraine, were also ethnic Russians, or even ethnic Ukrainians who felt misrepresented within their own society. This physical border between the regions and the rest of Ukraine is indicative of a cultural wall or divide between two ethnic groups. Due to the former colonialism in Ukraine, and the cultural and ethnic disparities that come along with it, the aftermath of such a penetrating hegemonic force in a state would naturally have everlasting effects when the former colonizer repeatedly intervenes and provides support to its ethnic group within that state. Thus, regardless if an empire dissolves or disseminates, the cultural colonialism of that empire can remain and continually penetrate and influence a society, as culture is a part of the human identity and cultural identity may be passed on as long as humans are in existence.

Within the DNR and LNR, the financial and military support from the Russian government to maintain their respective regions goes as far financing its residents pensions, government salaries, and social benefits. For example, in December 2016, the DNR reported that with a current population of 2 million (and Luhansk over 1.5 million), more than 640,000 residents were receiving monthly pensions and approximately 110,000 recipients received child and family allowances. The DNR expressed that it lacked the skills and administrators to maintain such a system, but the main concentration by Russia is focused and financed around their military and security institutions. Moreover, approximately \$40 million a month goes

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<sup>60</sup> Tlostanova, 2021, p.171

towards the DNR pensioners. If one includes the additional 410,000 LNR pensioners, then the total amount exceeds \$700 million a year for both regions alone. Social benefit payments accumulate to over \$3.5 million in 2016, for about 110,000 DNR residents, however the government salaries with the region are unknown, but pensions, allowances, and state salaries may exceed \$1 billion a year within the regions.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, these two regions are not simply breakaway states in which reside a small minority of individuals, but contain administrative, military and security systems for the ethnic populations which reside within these borders.

In conclusion, it is evident that the cultural and ethnic influence of the USSR and Russia exists past the fall of the Soviet empire, through the establishment of the three breakaway territories in Ukraine, and the importance they serve for Russia in maintaining its sphere or influence within the nation.

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#### UKRAINE'S ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SHIFT FROM RUSSIA

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As a former party to the Commonwealth of Independent States, Ukraine's trade relations with Russia and the other Eastern European and Asian member states diminished after the Ukrainian revolution and subsequent territorial disputes in its eastern and southern regions. At first, in order to avoid the emergence of a strong CIS without Ukraine, it prioritized its bilateral relations with Russia by signing a free trade agreement was in June 1993. This agreement was a method to move relations from the system of planned deliveries to market principles and stop the decline in bilateral trade between Ukraine and Russia. However, this agreement provided limited trade liberalization for Ukraine, containing no disciplines for breaches of its provisions. Moreover, Ukraine become more vulnerable to Russia's superior bargaining power in a bilateral context, due to weak multilateral CIS framework in halting Russia's hegemonic position over the post-Soviet region.<sup>62</sup> Ukraine's economic

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<sup>61</sup> International Crisis Group, 2016, p.4-5; Al Jazeera, 2022, February 21

<sup>62</sup> Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2014, p.683

interdependence with Russia was high during the 2000s, with many of its main manufacturing outputs powered almost entirely by Russian gas. While Russia was heavily reliant on Ukraine's gas pipelines to transport hydrocarbons to customers in the west, energy-poor state, Ukraine's dependence was far greater on Russia with regard to trade and energy than the other way around. For example, in 2011 Russia accounted for almost 28% of Ukraine's trade, yet Ukraine accounted for less than 5% of Russia's trade. Thus, Ukraine relied more on energy supplies from Russia as one of the largest consumers of Russian gas in the world at the time.<sup>63</sup>

Following the economic crisis of 2008–2009, the Ukrainian government and oligarchs acknowledged their vulnerability to Russian restrictions and ad hoc protectionist measures on trade. Before the economic crisis, the Ukrainian elites did little to prepare for the consequences of reorientation through reform, while economic dependency on Russia increased during the late 2000s, due to Ukraine's unreformed economy and outdated technological capacity (especially with regard to more value-added goods, such as machinery), which made it difficult for Ukraine to capture other markets, including the EU's.<sup>64</sup> The Ukrainian government thus sought out a new legal framework with the CIS and joined the trade agreement in 2011. The focus of the CIS was designed to focus solely on trade issues, which was beneficial for the country, as they could simultaneously pursue EU integration as the CIS was deemed compatible with DCFTA. The fact that the Ukrainians initiated the DCFTA before ratifying the CIS exemplifies the significance of the EU trade agreement to the Ukrainian elite. Nonetheless, the offer of a CIS was not designed to liberalize trade, rather to draw Ukraine further into the EACU which became evident in Annex 6 of the trade agreement. This allowed Russia to raise tariffs, provided the amount of Ukraine's imports increased, and created vague provisions regarding the preconditions and the process of activating it, allowing for self-interpretations by Russia. As a result, Ukraine received little benefits from the CIS and became more vulnerable to the general consequences deriving from Annex 6.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2014, p.680

<sup>64</sup> Gnedina & Sleptsova, 2012, as cited in Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2014, p.681

<sup>65</sup> Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2014, p.691

In 2014, Russia's strategy shifted to coercion and the energy and trade dependence between both states fell sharply. With the EU's AA/DCFTA agreement coming into effect in 2016, Russia suspended its free trade agreements with Ukraine. Both nations placed restrictions on each other's imports with Russia including banning Ukraine on certain European goods that had been in place since August 2014. Trade also dropped due to an economic slump with Ukraine falling into a 3-year recession between 2013-15, and the Russian economy also dropping between in 2015 and 2016, as global oil prices decreased. This decline was due to the effects of the regional slowdown between 2014 to 2016, in addition to Russia's continual crackdown on goods transiting through its country and from Ukraine. By autumn 2015, Russia's share in Ukraine's trade fell to 18.2%, whereas the EU's grew to 31.5%. By 2016, Ukraine's trade with the CIS, excluding Russia, had dropped to \$6.3 billion, a 50 percent lower amount than in 2011, and compared to \$15.4 billion in 2011. Russia's last attempt was to revise the terms of the AA in trilateral talks with the EU and Ukraine using the threat of activating Annex 6 of the CIS, and with the hopes of at least halting the DCFTA. But with the EU and Ukraine finding their complaints to be baseless, Russia eventually stopped applying the CIS to Ukraine and introduced the MFA tariffs as of January 2016, ending the free trade agreements between both states.<sup>66</sup>

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## UKRAINE'S SHIFT TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN UNION

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The basic framework for the alignment of Ukraine's foreign and security policy with the EU began in 2000. Both actors have since signed several bilateral agreements aimed at strengthening mutual cooperation, such as the 2002 Mechanisms for Consultations on Crisis Management, the 2005 Agreement on the Security Procedures for the Exchange of Classified Information, and the 2005 Agreement Establishing a Framework for the Participation of

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<sup>66</sup> Dragneva and de Kort, 2007, as cited in Bhutia, 2019; Varfolomeyev, 2015; Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015, as cited in Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2014, p.694

Ukraine in the EU-led Crisis Management Operations (2005).<sup>67</sup> Following the 2004-2005 Orange Revolution, the EU agreed to Ukraine's appeal for a new legal framework, despite denying Ukraine EU membership.<sup>68</sup> This new framework became known as the Association Agreement (AA) which emerged in 2007, whereas the negotiations on the economic part of the agreement was launched after Ukraine's accession to the WTO in 2008, which is known as the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). However, while Ukraine demanded stronger relations with the EU appealing for deeper integration and EU membership, Ukrainian elites were averse to face the high economic consequences of moving away from Russia.<sup>69</sup> Former Ukrainian President Yanukovich acknowledged that integration with the EU was the strategic choice for Ukraine at the time and continued concluding negotiations on the AA. Yet, with the EU's lack of a long-term solution on a Ukrainian modernization plan, in addition to no instant solution to Ukraine's accumulated problems, the European integration process appeared insurmountable to Kyiv. In addition, as a result of Yanukovich's authoritarian actions and selective impediments towards political opponents, such as the imprisonment of key opposition figures, namely Yulia Tymoshenko, the EU made the signing of the AA conditional upon democratic reforms in Ukraine.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, the AA was intended to align Ukraine's foreign, security, and defense policies with those of the EU at bilateral, regional, and multilateral levels. Through the AA, both parties (specifically Ukraine) would strive towards peaceful resolutions concerning regional conflicts and reaffirm their commitment to sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the uphold of borders in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. Or as stated within the 2015 Association Agenda, an instrument aimed to prepare and facilitate the full implementation of the AA, to "intensify consultations and coordination through available diplomatic and military channels to address international issues of common concern, including and especially challenges to commonly shared principles of international

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<sup>67</sup> Emerson and Movchan, 2021, p.41-42

<sup>68</sup> Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2014, 2015, as cited in Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2016, p.689

<sup>69</sup> Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2016, p.689

<sup>70</sup> Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2016, p.689-690

peace and security". The Association Agenda further mentions that the parties will utilize the bilateral and multilateral mechanisms to manage a sustainable political solution for the illegal activities caused by Russia in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. Moreover, in Paragraph 3, Section 7 of the Association Agenda, it includes the implementation of an Action Plan on the border sector between Ukraine and Russia at the administrative line with Crimea by increasing Ukrainian authorities at the central and regional levels.<sup>71</sup>

However, the fire that really ignited the transition of Ukraine to look westward, was the government changeover following the Maiden protests of 2013, when the national government sought further democratic reforms by strengthening closer ties with the European Union. As Snyder (2015) states:

The prospect of an association agreement with the EU was popular in Ukraine because it was seen as a step forward toward the rule of law. The political theory that governed the actions on the Maidan was a simple one, but it was often overlooked. It had to do with a positive logic of integration. Civil society, the state, and Europe were all dependent on one another. The state needed civil society to push it toward Europe and it needed Europe to push it away from corruption. Integration would reinforce sovereignty and sovereignty would reinforce integration but not automatically—not without a large number of Ukrainian citizens being willing to take risks.<sup>72</sup>

Therefore, EU integration produced two different reactions from Russia and Ukraine. Russia further feared that western expansion would weaken the relationship between Ukraine and Russia, expanding further east, and dampening its economic policies between it and the other post-Soviet states. Ukraine, on the other hand, found that the DCFTA provided a better

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<sup>71</sup> European Commission 2015; Emerson and Movchan, 2021, p.39-40

<sup>72</sup> Snyder, 2015, p.703



opportunity and more economic flexibility than the CIS and Russia's bilateral trade policies, allowing for possible deeper integration into the EU.

Russia's annexation of Crimea and the 2014 war in eastern Ukraine severely affected the focus for joint cooperation efforts in the foreign and security policy domains between both states. As Russia officially denied its connection in the military conflict in the Donbas region, Ukraine was unable to achieve any de-escalation through bilateral negotiations. With help from the EU in its diplomatic efforts, in addition to sanctions imposed on Russian individuals and entities, the Union's alliance significantly reduced hostilities during the conflict. Ukraine joined the EU as well in decisions imposing several sanctions on Russia, including travel bans and asset freezes on individuals and entities liable for action against Ukraine's territorial integrity. Since spring 2017, trade with the three occupied territories has been banned.<sup>73</sup>

In 2014-2015, trilateral talks were held between the EC, Russia, and Ukraine in support of the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements, with the goal of solutions for Russian concerns regarding the application of the DCFTA. During this meeting, Russia expressed its concerns regarding customs cooperation, technical barriers to trade (TBT), and sanitary and phytosanitary issues (SPS). Both parties agreed to postpone the provisional application of the DCFTA until 1 January 2016 while negotiations occurred in order to agree upon a mutual solution, yet Russia ultimately produced numerous proposals that would have destroyed the DCFTA or defer its implementation. After numerous trilateral meetings, the EC and Ukraine requested clarification on Russia's issues concerning the DCFTA, but no agreement could be reached between both parties and the trilateral negotiations were discontinued at the end of 2015. The DCFTA entered provisionally into force on 1 January 2016 and fully on 1 September 2017.<sup>74</sup> Despite the economic and political successes between the EU and Ukraine, the DCFTA is generally viewed by some scholars and experts as a disruptive and failed attempt

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<sup>73</sup> Emerson and Movchan, 2021, p.42

<sup>74</sup> Emerson and Movchan, 2021, p.40; European Commission, 2015

that disregarded Ukraine's pre-existing economic ties, regional interdependencies, and the integration commitments and interests of Russia, its largest dependency.<sup>75</sup>

Currently, Ukraine's largest trading partner apart from China and the US, the EU accounts for more than 40% of its trade in 2019.<sup>76</sup> In 2013, the EU's share of the trade volumes for both Ukrainian imports and exports only slightly exceeded Russia's. But by 2019, exports to the EU had grown to 41.5%, compared to 6.5% for Russia, and for imports, the EU now had 41.1% compared to 11.5% for Russia. Ukraine's EU trade deals now equate to four to six times bigger than Russia's.<sup>77</sup> Ukraine is the 18th largest trading partner of the EU accounting for approximately 1,1% of the EU's total trade with a total trade between both actors accumulating to €43,3 billion in 2019. Ukraine's exports to the EU equaled to almost €19.1 billion in 2019, with raw materials, such as iron, steel, mining products, and agricultural products being its largest exports, in addition to chemical products and machinery. This is a significant increase of 48,5% since 2016. The EU exports to Ukraine equaled to over €24.2 billion in 2019, with machinery and transport equipment, chemicals, and manufactured goods being the main exports. Correspondingly, the EU's exports to Ukraine have also had an increase since 2016 of 48,8%. The amount of Ukrainian companies exporting to the EU has increased from approximately 11,700 in 2015 to over 14,500 in 2019.<sup>78</sup>

In April 2014, the Council of the EU backed proposals giving economic and financial support to Ukraine. This included approximately €1bn loan in macro-financial assistance (MFA) to Ukraine in support of its economic stabilization and its structural reform agenda. Moreover, the EU adopted a regulation granting unilateral trade preferences to Ukraine, offering a temporary decrease or elimination in customs duties in advance of the implementation of the EU-Ukraine association agreement. Previous MFA's to Ukraine were dispersed out in 2014 and early 2015, which equated to approximately €610 billion in loans. This was followed up by the

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<sup>75</sup> Steinmeier, 2013; Mearsheimer, 2014; Braithwaite, 2015; Tsygankov, 2015, as cited in Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2016, p.679

<sup>76</sup> European Commission, 2021; European Commission 2022

<sup>77</sup> Emerson and Movchan, 2021, p.10

<sup>78</sup> European Commission, 2021

adoption of further EU MFA operations for Ukraine in 2015 (€1.8 billion); 2018 (€1 billion); and 2020 (€1.2 billion).<sup>79</sup> These MFA operations are indicative of the EU's commitment for improving the economic sectors of Ukraine, with the intention of developing structural and institutional reforms for the country to be more in-sync with the EU member states standards.

Furthermore, the EU's MFA operations are part of the Union's commitment to neighbouring states, that is intended as a special EU crisis response instrument, for issues such as severe balance-of-payments. Naturally, a partiality of the funding of the MFA is conditional on the implementation of certain policy measures within Ukraine, such as the third €610 million instalment of 2015, which was not paid out due to Ukraine failing 4 out of 17 policy commitments, which included corruption reforms and were conditional for the payout. By 2020, the MFA funds provided to Ukraine were the largest the EU had provided to any single partner country in its history. The EC has so far provided Ukraine five consecutive MFA loans equaling to €5 billion, from 2014-2021.<sup>80</sup>

In addition, the EU announced on 1 February 2022, a €1.2 billion MFA programme to Ukraine, as well as an additional allocation of €120 million towards bilateral assistance grant funding, to strengthen Ukraine's state-building and resilience endeavors. The EC stated that in addition to the aforementioned loans and grants, its Economic and Investment Plan for Ukraine aimed to provide additional €6.5 billion in investments in the following years. Between 2014 and the beginning of 2022, the EU had allocated over €17 billion in grants and loans to Ukraine, including €1.7 billion in bilateral cooperation; €355 in foreign policy instruments; €190 million in humanitarian assistance; €9.5 billion in loans from the European Investment Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.<sup>81</sup>

On 28 February 2022, President Zelenskyy submitted an official application to join the European Union. The same day, President Ursula von der Leyen of the EC stated, "they are one of us, and we want them in" but clarified the process which occur a lengthy period. At an EU

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<sup>79</sup> Fella, 2022a, p.14

<sup>80</sup> Fella, 2022a, p.14-15

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.15-16

leaders' summit on 10-11 March 2022, EU member states declared that "Ukraine belongs to our European family" and the EC was invited to submit its opinion on Ukraine's application. During the application wait, EU leaders pledged the EU would deepen its partnership with Ukraine and support its effort in "its European path".<sup>82</sup> With the significant EU loans and grants towards, that recommend institutional and structural reforms to fight corruption, and improve economic stabilization, it is evident the EU has committed to integrating Ukraine further into the west.

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## 6. THE CONCLUSION

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The main intention behind this thesis was to exemplify how Ukraine is a postcolonial state, which is seldomly discusses within postcolonial discourse as the main focal points regarding colonialization and postcolonization, center around the former European empires colonizing nations in Africa, Asia, South America, and North America, yet rarely within the western hemisphere itself. Therefore, this thesis attempted to analyze Ukraine's historical relationship with Russia following its independence from the USSR and argue the following three points within the analysis, whole setting the historical and theoretical examples in the earlier chapters.

Firstly, due to Ukraine being a postcolonial state due to its colonization by the Soviet Union, territorial conflicts continue to occur throughout the country, specifically in the pro-Russian territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, and Crimea. This is in part due to the cultural influence the USSR has had in the state, creating a divide and conflict between the Ukrainians and Russians. Secondly, the territorial disputes, Orange Revolution and Maiden Revolution, and current war in Ukraine, has forced Ukraine to shift its economically and political dependency away from Russia, resulting in a decrease in imports and exports between both actors, and a diminishing in mutual agreements and policies, even prior to the current war in Ukraine.

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<sup>82</sup> Fella, 2022b

Thirdly, Ukraine is shifting its economic and political dependency towards the West, specifically the EU. This is evident in the EU's recent integration and economic strategies of the AA/DCFTA with Ukraine, which is causing an increase of imports and exports between both actors for greater European integration.

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