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## Neighborhood Relations in Times of War

The six analyses in this issue look at Ukraine's relations with its neighbors and how they have developed since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Pavlo Rad describes how—although relations between Kyiv and Minsk are at a low point and Ukraine perceives the regime in Minsk as a threat—Kyiv still maintains a dialogue with Belarus on practical issues. As for Poland, Tadeusz Iwański highlights that Kyiv and Warsaw prioritize security issues and, despite all economic and historical disputes, feel bound by a shared goal of countering the Russian aggression and supporting Ukraine's EU and NATO integration. Ukraine and Slovakia, after years of neglect and a cooling of relations under Slovakia's pro-Russian leadership under Fico, maintain a pragmatic cooperation driven mainly by Slovakia's economic interests and Ukraine's security priorities, concludes Yuri Panchenko. Dmytro Tuzhanskyi analyses the complex Ukrainian–Hungarian relations, that, already in crisis before 2022 due to minority right issues, even got worse due to different geopolitical interests. By contrast, Ukrainian–Romanian relations, once marked by historical tensions and border disputes, have developed quite positively, and Romania has become one of Ukraine's most important supporters against Russia's war of aggression and in its EU ambitions, writes Sergiy Gerasymchuk. This issue is rounded off by a piece on Ukrainian–Moldovan relations by Sergiy Sydorenko, who shows that bilateral relations between Kyiv and Chişinău—driven by the mutual threat in Moscow as well as shared EU aspirations—are at a historic high.

The articles in this issue were published in [June](#) and [July](#) 2024 in our German-language partner publication, the [Ukraine-Analysen](#). For the present issue of the Ukrainian Analytical Digest they have been revised in the course of our peer review process. However, as the articles were written in the summer, they do not necessarily reflect the latest developments—such as the elections in Moldova—unless they were taken up in the course of the revision process.

*Eduard Klein, responsible editor*

## ANALYSIS

### Ukrainian–Belarusian Relations amid the Russo–Ukrainian War

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#### Abstract

This article delves into the changes in Ukraine–Belarus relations after the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and Belarus's subsequent participation in it, focusing on political, economic, and military realms. Despite perceiving the regime in Minsk as a threat, Kyiv maintains dialogue with Minsk mostly on practical issues while having a restrained position toward cooperation with the Belarusian democratic forces. The article emphasizes that this cautious approach stems not only from Ukraine's security imperatives but also from the lack of vision and strategy toward Belarus.

#### Introduction

Before the anti-government protests in 2020 in Belarus—caused by election fraud and suppression—Ukraine–Belarus relations were already complicated. They were marred by unresolved questions and mutual grievances, such as the impact of the development of the sand and chalk deposit “Khotislavsk” on the hydro-ecological conditions of Ukrainian territory, including the

Shatsk National Park. The unprecedented crackdown on pro-democracy activists and Lukashenka's deepening integration with the Russian Federation indicated a lasting nature to the crisis, with Ukraine and Belarus pursuing divergent trajectories of political development.

Nevertheless, because Belarus's deepening integration with Russia was considered undesirable by Kyiv, Ukraine did not comment too negatively on Lukash-

enka's regime. Although Ukraine did not recognize Aliaksandr Lukashenka as a legitimate president, Kyiv authorities refrained from openly supporting Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and did not call for new elections in Belarus. This was seen as a gesture of goodwill in Minsk.

However, Ukraine's wager on the maintenance of Belarusian sovereignty turned out to be a losing bet. Lukashenka's involvement in Russia's full-scale invasion prompted Kyiv to significantly reassess its approach toward Lukashenka's regime. Consequently, bilateral relations plummeted to an all-time low, with signs of degradation evident in the political, economic, and security realms.

### Deterioration of Political Relations

Belarus's participation in Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine was a logical result of the geopolitical choices made by Minsk. It led to the unprecedented deterioration of bilateral relations with minimal communication and diplomatic withdrawals. Although both states preserve *de jure* diplomatic relations, practical engagement has been severely restricted. Ukrainian and Belarusian ambassadors have been recalled, with Ukraine reducing its embassy staff in Minsk to just five and Belarus evacuating its diplomats from Ukraine.

Despite criticism, Kyiv still preserves diplomatic relations with Belarus for several reasons. First, Moscow and Kyiv use Minsk as a channel to exchange notes and transmit legal and consular documents. Second, the presence of Ukrainian diplomats on Belarusian soil is a signal that Ukraine will not resort to military force against Belarus. Third, and the most important one, Belarus is one of the few routes by which Ukrainians from occupied territories can reach territories controlled by the Ukrainian government.

So while there is no communication at the highest level, certain messages—mostly of security and humanitarian nature—are transmitted through intelligence services or other closed channels. Ultimately, classical tools of wartime diplomacy are used with the aim of influencing the Belarusian political leadership and mitigating the security challenges posed by the regime in Minsk.

### The Effect of the War on Bilateral Trade

The decline in political relations led to a deterioration in economic ties between Belarus and Ukraine. Until 2022, trade served as Kyiv's primary means to resist Russian influence over Belarusian sovereignty. Even when the EU imposed sectoral sanctions on Belarus in mid-2021, Ukraine remained the main market for Belarusian petroleum products and electricity exports and continued to transport Belarusian goods, such as fertilizers, through its maritime ports.

As a result, trade between the two states reached its peak in 2021 with a total turnover of USD 6.9 billion. Although the positive trade balance for Belarus amounted to USD 3.9 billion, the dependence of the Belarusian economy on trade with Ukraine was higher than that of Ukrainian on Belarus. Thus, the loss of the Ukrainian market, formerly Belarus's second largest after Russia, coupled with the most severe sanctions imposed by Western countries became one of the strongest challenges to the Belarusian economy.

When Kyiv realized that leaving Belarus room for geopolitical maneuvering did not bring the expected results, Ukrainian authorities changed their approach and divested from strategically important Belarusian imports, particularly petroleum products. Prioritizing its security interests, Kyiv simply could not maintain flourishing trade relations with Minsk. Consequently, bilateral trade also plummeted from an all-time peak of USD 6.9 billion in 2021 to USD 1.6 billion in 2022. It is worth noting that most of the 2022 trade between the two countries took place in January and February. For comparison, in February 2022, trade turnover between Belarus and Ukraine amounted to USD 543.2 million but in August of the same year it was only USD 7 million.

In 2023, the degradation of trade relations continued even further with trade turnover between the two states amounting to a meager USD 23.3 million—a 99% decrease compared to 2022. Data from the first quarter of 2024 suggests that recent trends have remained the same. With the denunciation of bilateral treaties in the economic realm and the introduction of sanctions against Belarusian individuals and enterprises, Ukraine's imports from Belarus fell to just USD 1.4 million in the first quarter of 2024.<sup>1</sup>

### The Evolution of the Lukashenka Regime's Role in the War

Belarus's direct security threats have largely decreased since early 2022, when between 30,000 and 40,000 Russian troops were stationed there. Currently, only around 2,000 Russian soldiers remain stationed in Belarus, mainly tasked with maintaining aviation and radio technical equipment.

While Belarus no longer hosts Russian offensive operations or missile strikes against Ukraine, its strategic importance persists. Belarus now plays a crucial role as a supplier of military hardware, ammunition, and components. The Lukashenka regime has reportedly transferred over 200 T-72A tanks, BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles, "Ural" trucks, and nearly 132,000 tons of munitions to Russia.

What is more important for the needs of the Russian army, is that Belarus is a crucial supplier of high-tech products such as optical devices, sighting complexes, fire

1 Information on exports to Belarus in 2024 is not available.

control systems, radio-electronic equipment, and software complexes. Belarusian military developments are integrated into Russian aviation and ground equipment, including main battle tanks, air defense systems, and missile systems. Belarus's involvement in the production of military equipment for Russia has helped the latter put its military-industrial complex on a war footing.

In addition to acting as Moscow's material and technical base, Belarus has also become part of Russia's psychological and information operations; for example, when leaked Pentagon documents revealed Russian efforts in the first half of 2023 to create an impression among Ukrainian intelligence of a potential second offensive originating from Belarus. These factors, coupled with mobilization training and periodic statements about preparation for war, are intended to put constant pressure on Ukrainian society and military-political leadership.

Similar processes are taking place in the context of Russia's offensive actions in eastern Ukraine and attempts to regain control over the lost territories of the Kursk region, with Belarus conducting military drills and accusing Ukraine of deploying saboteurs on its territory and violating Belarusian airspace.

This led Lukashenka to publicly deploy additional troops to the border with Ukraine in June 2024—allegedly in response to military maneuvers of the Ukrainian army. In parallel with creating artificial tensions on the border with Ukraine, the Lukashenka regime was trying to expand its room for geopolitical maneuvering, in particular thanks to military drills with China and the release of political prisoners. Perhaps Belarus's actions did not pass unnoticed. Russia deployed Shahed 136/131 kamikaze drones and cruise missiles into Ukraine through Belarusian airspace on several occasions. Concerned about the situation getting out of control, on July 13, Lukashenka ordered the withdrawal of troops from the border with Ukraine to avoid triggering a military response from Kyiv.

However, on August 10, almost one month after de-escalation, Lukashenka ordered the redeployment of one-third of the Belarusian army to the Ukrainian border, citing an alleged violation of Belarusian airspace. Such reactions were caused by Ukraine's operation in the Kursk region and Russian media accusing Lukashenka of deliberately withdrawing troops from the border with Ukraine in July, thus enabling the UAF to open a new front. To bring down the wave of accusations and imitate compliance with its ally obligations, Minsk embarked on demonstrative actions sending just 1,400 men to the Ukrainian border.

### **Serious Escalation is Unlikely**

At the same time, Lukashenka has shown no interest in directly entering the war. Transforming Belarus into

a battleground would jeopardize his regime, inviting significant internal and external destabilization. This outcome would also be detrimental to Russia, as Ukrainian attacks on defense installations and refineries within Belarus could disrupt crucial supplies of components and petroleum products.

Furthermore, Ukraine is not only better prepared for potential escalation but also has support from Belarusian volunteer units, notably the Kalinousky Regiment. These volunteers are perceived by Minsk as potential threats and sources of internal destabilization. Consequently, Belarus's Ministry of Internal Affairs has established anti-terrorist units, while the Belarusian KGB has labeled the volunteers as extremists and initiated legal proceedings against their families.

Belarusian officials are acutely aware of the risks associated with escalating tensions with Ukraine and make periodic efforts to mitigate them. For instance, following the deployment of additional forces to the Ukrainian border in June, Lukashenka announced their withdrawal, citing a desire to stabilize relations with Kyiv. Even after the beginning of a new circle of escalation in relations with Ukraine amid Kyiv's operation in the Kursk region, Lukashenka stated about alleged agreements with Ukraine concerning the non-disclosure of facts of drones reaching Belarusian territory.

In addition, Kyiv and Minsk may have established certain mutually unacceptable red lines through the intelligence services. This could explain why Ukraine refrains from conducting sabotage operations deep in Belarusian territory or from targeting military facilities as it does in Russia. And it could explain why Minsk's actions are limited to military maneuvers on its territory.

However, threats posed by the regime in Minsk should not be underestimated. Since July 2024, Russia has been regularly deploying Shahed 136/131 kamikaze drones both into Belarus and Ukraine through Belarusian airspace. These actions are not perceived as a serious escalation but they are demonstrative in terms of Belarusian incumbent authorities' ability to exercise full control over the security situation in the country. Even the fact that on September 5 the Belarusian Air Force shot down a Russian Shahed 136/131 kamikaze drone does not change that fact. Because of Moscow's disproportionate influence over Belarus's security affairs, there is always the risk that Moscow may again resort to using Belarusian territory for regular attacks on Ukraine.

### **A Restrained Position toward Belarusian Democratic Forces**

While Belarusian volunteers are seen as integral to a military-political strategy aimed at deterring the Lukashenka regime, Kyiv exercises caution in collab-

orating with Belarusian activist and opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and her team. Security remains Kyiv's foremost concern, prompting Ukrainian authorities to avoid actions that might provoke Lukashenka or strain delicate relations with Minsk by deepening engagement with Belarusian democratic forces who are perceived as having limited ability to deter the Minsk regime or significantly aid Ukraine's war efforts.

However, compared to the 2022–2023 period when Ukrainian authorities were accused of opposing Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's participation in joint events and downplaying the Lukashenka regime's role in the war, recent trends indicate that Kyiv's position toward cooperation with the Belarusian democratic forces is becoming more open.

Notably, in January of this year, Tsikhanouskaya held a brief discussion with Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs, during the World Economic Forum in Davos. Subsequently, Kyiv appointed an ambassador-at-large for Belarus tasked with engaging Belarusian democratic forces. In addition, there is ongoing communication between Ukrainian lawmakers and representatives of the United Transitional Cabinet of Belarus, which helps members of the Belarusian democratic movement communicate their position.

Furthermore, there has been a minor shift in Ukrainian rhetoric too. While in 2022, Mykhailo Podolyak, advisor to the head of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's presidential office, questioned the need for closer relations with Belarusian democratic forces, this year, President Zelenskyy publicly endorsed Belarus's potential future membership in the European Union and emphasized the need for a free and democratic Belarus.

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#### **Conclusions**

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Ukraine–Belarus relations have deteriorated to their lowest point in history with signs of degradation spanning political, economic, and military domains. Although Ukraine has been successful in terms of reducing security threats posed by Belarus, such a narrow approach does not help resolve long-term challenges related to integration processes between Belarus and Russia.

In newly emerging circumstances, Ukraine demonstrates a lack of a strategic vision aimed at adopting a comprehensive strategy toward Belarus. This risks turning into a more serious security and socio-economic issues for Kyiv taking into account Minsk's strained relations with all of its neighbors except Russia.

Ukraine must adopt a proactive and nuanced approach toward Belarus, employing a broad array of tools. Ukrainian authorities should not limit themselves to engagement with Belarusian democratic forces nor with the current Lukashenka regime. Kyiv should establish a clear and pragmatic communication mechanism with Minsk, monitoring the moods of the elites and reminding Lukashenka that there is an alternative path of de-escalation. In parallel, Ukraine needs not only to achieve tactical interests in the context of interaction with Minsk, but also to strengthen the capabilities of Lukashenka's opponents to work within Belarusian society. This approach would enhance Kyiv's ability to manage negative repercussions effectively, capitalize on opportunities to support the Belarusian democratic movement, and navigate relations with Minsk's leadership more adeptly.

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## The Development of Ukrainian–Polish Relations since the Beginning of the Russian Full-Scale Invasion

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### Abstract

Despite disputes on economic grounds that have triggered a huge zigzag in relations between Poland and Ukraine over the last two years, security issues primarily define these relations today. A dense network of bilateral and people-to-people contacts stabilizes them and the shared fundamental interest in defeating Russia and Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO is mutual and dominant. The two countries are entering the third year of the war with a clean slate and a common goal of resisting Russian aggression.

### Introduction

In the three decades since the collapse of the USSR, relations between independent Ukraine and independent Poland have gone through various ups and downs. Kyiv refused to recognize the ethnic cleansing of Poles by Ukrainian nationalists in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia in 1943–1944, which led to tensions. Nevertheless, both sides always described their mutual relations as strategic, based above all on the recognition of the common threat from Russia and the need to integrate Ukraine into transatlantic institutions.

Since the start of the Russian full-scale invasion in 2022, the relations between Poland and Ukraine first skyrocketed to new highs of mutual friendship, solidarity, and support, before they—after less than a year—began to consistently deteriorate, mainly over economic factors. This turnaround proved sudden, surprising, and painful for both sides. However, the disputes that arose between Poland and Ukraine in 2023, and dragged on into the first quarter of 2024, often overshadow those spheres where cooperation is fruitful and effective, though less resonant in the media. And they have not caused the authorities or societies of the two countries to turn away from each other. Nor do these disputes signal a significant change when it comes to the vital interests of the two countries in bilateral relations. Just as it is in Poland's interest for Ukraine to win the war and become an independent, democratic, and reformed member of the transatlantic community, Ukraine's authorities will not achieve these primal goals without Poland's support.

### Poland's Rapid Military Aid was Vital for Ukraine's Survival

After more than two and a half years since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, it is worth recalling that Poland was the first state to rush without preconditions to the aid of Ukraine. When other countries were debating aid in the form of non-lethal weapons and preparing for Ukraine's swift defeat, the first Polish military aid package was already on its way to Ukraine on the very first day of the invasion. Furthermore, Polish T-72 tanks arrived in Ukraine in March and infantry fighting vehicles in April 2022, making it possible to arm the new Ukrainian army units being formed from volunteers and mobilized men. Deliveries of self-propelled tracked gun-howitzers Krab in June of the same year—the first NATO 155mm caliber units of this type to be received by Ukrainians—and providing Ukraine priority in purchasing new units of this armament, made it easier for Ukraine to get through the first months of the war and achieve success in 2022.

Poland also played a key role in the discussion on the transfer of Soviet-type MiG-29 multirole fighter jets to Ukraine and was the first to hand them over along with Slovakia in March 2023, and it was Warsaw which mobilized partners to form a coalition to hand over Leopard 2A4 tanks to Ukraine. Videos of the effectiveness of Polish armaments—including Grot carbines, MLRS, and Gozdzik howitzers—echoed in Ukraine no less than the successes of Turkey's Bayraktar drones. Furthermore, Poland provided Ukraine with the know-how on how to combine Soviet armaments with Western ones, such as installing the US air-to-surface anti-radiation missile HARM on MiG-29 fighter jets. Poland

also became a major supplier of fuel, the importance of which for both military and civilian needs in wartime can hardly be overestimated. According to official information from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, since the Russian invasion, Poland has approved 44 military aid packages for Kyiv and the total value of Polish government support, not including the USD multi-billion spent on refugee aid, amounted to about USD 4.5 billion in the first two years of the war.

#### Warsaw's Support Strengthens Poland's Positive Image in Ukraine

The unprecedented support for Ukraine also manifested in the opening of the border and the admission of millions of refugees, of whom about one million remain officially registered in Poland to this day. The point is not only in the numbers. The openness, solidarity, and hospitality of the Poles towards their Ukrainian guests will long be remembered even despite the harsh disputes at high political levels. The Polish–Ukrainian bilateral relations since the war have set the pattern of behavior, a moral benchmark, for how other European countries should stand with the victims of Russian aggression. Poland's special law in March 2022, equating Ukrainian citizens *de jure* with Polish citizens, provided real help to millions of refugees, including children, who were given free access to the education and health care systems. Furthermore, over the past two years, Poland has become a major donor of humanitarian aid to Ukraine. In total, Polish government ministries have disbursed EUR 16 billion in comprehensive aid to Ukraine and Ukrainian war refugees.

Poland also played a key role, even before February 24, 2022, when it convinced France and Germany that a compromise with Russia over Ukraine was not only impossible, but even harmful. And Warsaw also helped logistically in the Ukrainian delegation's first talks with Russia in Belarus and Turkey on ending the war. They proved unsuccessful—not because they were broken off by Ukraine, but because by Putin who was no more ready back than now for any real compromise other than Ukraine's full capitulation.

As a result, Poland's positive image in Ukraine reached a zenith that lasted for many months. As late as May 2023, positive and very positive attitudes toward Poland were declared by almost 95% of Ukrainian respondents (Ratinggroup, 2024), and in December 2022, Polish President Andrzej Duda enjoyed the highest trust ranking among leaders of other countries (New Europe Center, 2023). This was confirmed at the highest political level, with a warm, even personal bond emerging between Presidents Duda and Zelensky. Polish visitors were even privileged in Ukraine, as Ukrainians were eager to repay the help they had been provided however they could. There was even an idea to sign a large bilat-

eral treaty, along the lines of the Treaty of Elysée between Germany and France, which would legally validate the unique nature of the relationship between Warsaw and Kiev. However, this did not happen.

#### From the First Cracks...

The gestures and actions from the Polish side, as well as the expressions of gratitude from the Ukrainian side, could be listed endlessly. However, every mobilization runs out at some point, and the greater the generosity to start, the shorter it can last. The Polish Armed Forces have been largely drained of armaments by transferring them to Ukraine and the newly ordered ones from the US and South Korea have not yet arrived. The Polish budget has felt the burden of the funds given to Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees, which has also been compounded by rapidly rising inflation. New negative economic effects began to come from important EU decisions in June 2022 when all trade barriers with Ukraine were lifted, and—in the face of Russia's blockade of Ukrainian Black Sea ports—bilateral road transport was liberalized. These decisions would probably have taken several years to be made in non-war conditions. This would have given market participants the necessary time to adjust. But they were made in a flash and supported by Warsaw based on necessity. And Warsaw felt the domestic backlash in the months that followed. Finally, Poland's parliamentary elections were approaching in October 2023 followed by local elections in April 2024.

The first serious cracks in Polish–Ukrainian bilateral relations began to appear earlier though, back in late 2022. In November, a rocket fell near the village of Przewodów in eastern Poland, killing two Polish citizens. Kyiv tried to argue that it was a Russian missile and that Poland should not leave the attack unanswered. Although most data indicated that the missile was Ukrainian, the Ukrainian leadership denied this in an attempt to get Warsaw, and ultimately NATO, more firmly involved in the war. However, no word of regret for the deaths of Poles was mentioned, leaving an unpleasant aftertaste among Poles. In April 2023, Zelenskiy finally paid an official visit to Poland—until then he had mainly used Poland, especially the airport near Rzeszów, as a transit point.

At the end of 2022, Poland was Ukraine's largest trading partner both in terms of imports and exports, as well as Ukraine's key logistics hub and largest fuel supplier. However, at high levels there were already difficult discussions about issues that soon began to sour the relations. The most difficult was the growing inflow of price-competitive Ukrainian grain to Poland after Russia blocked the so-called Black Sea Grain Initiative. The “grain agreement” created a safe sea corridor in the Black Sea between the ports in the Odesa area and



the Bosphorus, which came about thanks to an agreement negotiated by Turkey and the UN. This enabled Ukraine to export food and grain from August 2022 to July 2023. The sea corridor was absolutely key, especially as Ukraine had exported almost 90 percent of its food and agricultural production by sea before the Russian invasion. The low-priced Ukrainian products, which had mainly taken the overland route by rail and road since the beginning of the war, flooded the Polish market (as well as the markets in Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and Bulgaria). Of the 29.5 million tons of Ukrainian corn, wheat, and rapeseed and sunflower oil that Ukraine exported to the EU between February 2022 and May 2023, 38.2 percent (11.3 million tons) went to these countries, 13.3 percent of which went to Poland (3.9 million tons). Because transportation by land (rail and road) is significantly more expensive than by sea, it was most profitable for Ukrainian exporters to sell their products on the nearest markets.

### ... Up to Border Blockades

This has caused distortions and losses primarily for local producers close to the border. As a result, in May 2023 the European Commission imposed an embargo on the import (but not transit!) of these four products into the EU, which Poland and the other four countries unilaterally extended in September 2023. The timing was not optimal. Russia withdrew in July 2023 from the Black Sea Grain Initiative and, in October, Poland held its parliamentary elections where the problems of Polish farmers had electoral consequences. As these problems were not understood or ignored in Kyiv, Polish enthusiasm for Ukraine cooled. Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal and President Volodymyr Zelenskiy seemed unaware that Poland continued to allow Ukraine to transit embargoed products. Additionally, Zelenskiy's speech at the UN in September, in which he hinted that the embargo that Poland was supporting was benefiting Russia—an accusation as absurd as unfair—poured a spell of bitterness in Poland and caused incomprehension in the West, to say the least.

Although grain was no longer flowing from Ukraine to Poland, in November Polish truck drivers began blocking border crossings. The protest was suspended in January 2024, but it caused a large backlash in Ukraine, where the media accused Poland of waging a trade war and trying to destroy Ukraine's transport market and even block Ukraine's accession to the EU. Polish protesters, in turn, complained about unfair competition from Ukrainian truck drivers not obliged to follow the strict requirements of the EU Mobility Package which took jobs away from Polish colleagues in both Ukraine and Poland. The drivers were soon joined by farmers who protested the EU's Green Deal and imports from

Ukraine. The blockade of border crossings with Ukraine was intended to hit the government hard and blackmail it with its loss of reputation both in Ukraine and the EU. Farmers are a sizeable and vocal interest group in Poland and more than one political party has emerged out of agricultural protests. These blockades have also been heavily politicized, and in part, most likely aided by Russia. These destructive emotions also culminated in the singular incidents of Ukrainian grain—harvested from mined and shelled fields—being dumped from trucks at the Dorohusk crossing and onto railroad sidetracks.

The blockade became the biggest blow to Poland's image in Ukraine. Kyiv accused Warsaw of failing to act decisively and fearing to show weakness ahead of local elections in April 2024. In March, positive and very positive attitudes toward Poland were declared by only 58.4%—less than for Germany, Romania, Slovakia, or Turkey (Razumkov Centre, 2024). The blockade of the border with Ukraine was considered a more important event than the withholding of US financial aid or Hungary's blocking of Ukraine's integration into the EU. What is worth emphasizing in this context: Poland did not block humanitarian and military aid shipments to Ukraine on a massive scale. These were individual cases, not a systemic plan by Polish farmers as they are well aware their safety and well-being depends on the effectiveness of the Ukrainians' resistance against Russia. Nevertheless, these issues have become a sphere of active influence for the Russians, who, by spreading disinformation on the subject, have sought and still seek to drive a deeper divide between Poland and Ukraine.

### Have the Waters Calmed Down?

Following the Polish local elections and the signing of a new trade agreement between the EU and Ukraine—which takes some of the Polish demands into account (like an emergency break)—the blockades finally ended in May 2024. The election period has passed as the election to the European Parliament does not resonate so much socially. The government's pressure on the protesters and the negotiated amendments to the EU trade liberalization agreement with Ukraine after June 2024 have also proved effective. This has created a strong basis for normalization and the restoration of good relations.

At the same time, it is important to not overestimate the grain and drivers disputes, as well as the border blockade, for Polish–Ukrainian relations. Trade conflicts, like conflicts on historical issues, are a permanent feature of the neighborhood. Just as economic rivalry is by definition inscribed in the free market and international trade. Certainly, the war created an additional context, and Ukraine, which is fighting for survival and defending Europe from further spillover, requires special treatment and extraordinary assistance. How-

ever, the scale of sacrifices should be distributed more equally among Ukraine's Western partners, and their burden should not be borne mainly by neighboring states. While it is easy to criticize Warsaw for allegedly turning its back on Ukraine, the governments of other allies like Germany are under much less pressure from the economic losses of specific interest groups.

Importantly, despite the trade disputes, Poland is not withdrawing its support for Ukraine's full membership in the EU (and NATO). This is because it recognizes that only such an arrangement can contribute to sustainable peace after the war ends. Future conflicts along these lines would be much better addressed with a reformed, democratic, and, above all, sovereign Ukraine as part of the EU. While the accession process will be long and fraught with inevitable conflicts, at the end of the day, the goal of Poland and Ukraine remains the same.

It should not be overlooked that in current disputes defending Ukraine against Russia, Poland has consistently supported Kyiv. In this domain, nothing has changed. Ukraine's leadership knows this well, although too often it seems to take it for granted, recognizing that Poland is "doomed" to Ukraine. The slogan "There is no free Poland without a free Ukraine" is also used by Kyiv to neglect its relationship with Warsaw. Importantly, the slogan is not entirely true given Poland membership in NATO and strategic relationship with the US.

## Conclusion

To sum up, the main points of common ground between Poland and Ukraine are largely based on strong mutual interests in the security sphere. The most important of these is defeating Russia so that it does not pose a threat

in the future. However, Kyiv tends to recognize that in helping its neighbor, Poland is primarily concerned with its own security. While this is partly the case, at the same time it limits Ukraine's readiness to implement Warsaw's demands in other spheres of bilateral relations, including the settlement of historical disputes. For example, Ukraine still does not agree to Polish exhumation work on the graves of Polish victims on Ukrainian territory and does not officially recognize the murder of Poles by Ukrainian nationalists in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia in 1943–1944 as genocide.

When it comes to discrepancies in Polish–Ukrainian relations since the war, most of them stem from the countries' different stances on economic issues. Nevertheless, they are seen in Kyiv as political rather than economic conflicts. Because Ukraine is existentially defending itself against Russia, any Polish actions which could negatively affect the Ukrainian economy are seen as weakening its defense potential, and are therefore illegitimate and immoral in furthering the *de facto* interests of the Kremlin. The government in Kyiv and the Ukrainian media in this context do not weigh the negative impact of Ukrainian competition on Polish markets, suggesting that it should not matter because Ukrainians are also fighting for the security of Poland.

Likewise, it is not helpful to change or soften the critical, or simply chilly, narrative toward Warsaw by Kyiv's assessment that Poland currently does not have or offer military or financial assistance on a scale comparable to that of the US or Germany. In many ways, Poland is paying here again for its large sacrifices during the first year of the war when Germany, for example, did not want to send weapons, but changed its policy under the influence of public opinion.

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## Pragmatic, Indifferent, or Good? On the State of Ukrainian–Slovak Relations

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### Abstract

Bilateral relations between Ukraine and Slovakia had been neglected on both sides for a long time. However, the situation changed with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and a phase of friendly relations and constructive cooperation has ensued. After the Slovakian parliamentary elections in 2023 and the re-election of the Russia-friendly Prime Minister Robert Fico, relations cooled down again. Nevertheless, both sides are working together pragmatically. While Slovakia is guided by economic interests, Ukraine prioritizes security aspects.

### Introduction

For a long time, Kyiv did not perceive bilateral relations with Slovakia as strategic. But with the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion, the situation changed significantly. For almost two years, the political relations between Kyiv and Bratislava entered a kind of "honeymoon" period. However, at the end of 2023, with the victory Eurosceptic Smer-SD party in the Slovak parliamentary elections and the formation of a government headed by the Russophile Prime Minister Robert Fico, the situation turned 180 degrees again. Fico has already made a number of openly anti-Ukrainian statements. He also said that Slovakia would stop providing military aid to Ukraine and would not support its accession to NATO.

Fears that Slovakia might become less friendly to Ukraine intensified after the 2024 presidential election, when Zuzana Čaputová was succeeded by Peter Pellegrini, who is close to Fico.

At the same time, fears that Slovakia will become a pro-Russian "second Hungary"—by blocking the allocation of financial aid to Ukraine and opposing its integration into the EU—have not materialized (yet).

What factors are currently shaping the relations between Kyiv and Bratislava? And what keeps the relations from sliding into a crisis?

### Energy and Nothing More

For many years, Kyiv's relations with Slovakia were not a priority. Economically, despite bordering Ukraine, Slovakia has not been an important market for Ukrainian export products. Until 2014, only 10 percent of Ukraine's exports to Slovakia were value-added products. Instead, mostly raw materials, in particular timber, were exported. And it is believed that a significant part of this timber traffic was illegal—a problem that led to mass logging in the Ukrainian Carpathian Mountains, which is perceived extremely negatively in Ukrainian society. Ukraine's current ban on timber exports has also

failed to solve this problem, as timber is now exported to the EU under the guise of "fuel raw materials." In 2018, the Ukrainian government estimated the volume of the smuggled timber market at UAH 6–8 billion.

Consequently, Ukrainian businesses had little interest in Slovakia, both as a market for their products and as a place to attract investment. Even though Ukrainian companies often tried to attract investments from Central Europe (as it is closer to Ukraine than Western Europe), Ukrainian investment conferences were practically never held in Slovakia.

Similarly, on the political level, Kyiv never perceived Bratislava as an important partner—particularly because of contrasting views regarding the Russian Federation. Unlike Poland, which has similar perceptions on the global threats of Russia, Slovak society has traditionally had strong Russophile tendencies. Accordingly, a significant part of Slovak society remained orientated toward the Russian Federation, which they widely saw as a leader of the Slavic world.

This is illustrated by the fact that when Ukraine revised its list of "strategic partners" in 2021 Azerbaijan and Brazil made the list, but not Slovakia. Furthermore, Slovakia was not even mentioned in the additional list of "potential" strategic partners.

Similarly, in Slovakia relations with Ukraine have long not been a priority. Only in the area of energy has Slovakia seen Ukraine as an important partner. This is because the Slovak gas transport corridor is an extension of the Ukrainian one. In 2023, Slovakia received EUR 227 million from gas transit for Russian gas coming through Ukraine. However, before the outbreak of the full-scale war, this amount was as high as EUR 750 million. Accordingly, the stability of energy relations between Kyiv and Moscow has always been extremely important for Bratislava—both in terms of the country's own gas supply as well its revenues for the transit of the Russian gas to Western European markets.

That is why the Russian–Ukrainian "gas war" of 2009 was a shock for Slovakia. Slovakia's losses were

estimated at about EUR 100 million per day. The crisis froze the relations between Slovakia and Ukraine. The Slovak government tried to get guarantees from Ukraine to maintain the gas transit. When it failed to receive them, Bratislava announced it would no longer support Kyiv's European aspirations.

However, five years later—ironically enough—it was Slovakia that turned out to be the savior during Ukraine's energy crisis. In 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea, attacked the Donbas, and froze the gas supply contract with Gazprom, it was the reversed gas supply from Slovakia that allowed Ukraine to compensate for the losses. Tellingly, during both the 2009 and the 2014 crises, Slovakia was governed by current Prime Minister Robert Fico. Importantly, the resentment over the 2009 conflict did not affect Slovakia's assistance in organizing the reversed gas flow to Ukraine in 2014 and after.

This example is very indicative for the Ukrainian–Slovak relations. Robert Fico is not an ideological politician, but primarily guided by commercial gain. And since the gas reverse flow was economically favorable for Slovakia, Fico went for it and thus supported Ukraine in the conflict with Russia.

### The Short “Honeymoon” Period

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Slovakia has been one of the leaders in supporting Kyiv, including with military assistance. Of course, the capabilities of a small country like Slovakia were inferior compared to the US or Germany, although also to Poland and the Czech Republic. On the whole, the volume of military aid transferred to Kyiv by Bratislava totalled EUR 671 million. However, in relation to its GDP, the country ranks 7<sup>th</sup> among Ukraine's biggest supporters.

But the real value of Bratislava's assistance was in its unprecedented nature and swift action. Back in April 2022, when most of Ukraine's allies transferred only small arms and anti-tank systems to Kyiv, Slovakia transferred its one and only S-300 air defence system, which made it more vulnerable and more dependent on allied support. And in 2023, the Slovak government transferred 13 MiG-29 fighter jets to the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU). Western-type military aircraft were delivered to Kyiv not until 2024.

At the same time, Slovakia received a large influx of Ukrainian refugees. More than 100,000 Ukrainians found temporary shelter in the neighboring country. Per capita, this is more than in Germany, for example.

This “honeymoon” period in the countries' bilateral relations became possible due to the 2020 change of power in Slovakia. At that time, the party of Prime Minister Robert Fico and his allies from Andrej Danko's Slovak National Party lost control and a new gov-

ernment was formed by a coalition of pro-European parties led by Igor Matovič's OĽaNO (now “Slovakia”). Consequently, Slovakia's foreign policy toward Ukraine became friendlier. However, this was not particularly noticeable at first. This was due not least to the eccentricity of Igor Matovič. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Matovič bypassed the entire government to purchase the Russian vaccine Sputnik V, a decision that would eventually cost him the prime minister's office. And in a radio interview, when he was asked by a journalist what he promised Russia in exchange for the vaccine, he replied “Carpathian Ukraine” (later he apologized for this joke).

Fortunately for Ukraine, by the time Russia launched its full-scale invasion, Slovakia's government was headed by Eduard Heger, Matovič's party colleague. Furthermore, the key ministers of Heger's government (i.e., Defence Minister Jaroslav Nagy and Foreign Ministers Ivan Korčok and Rastislav Kačér) were firmly pro-Ukrainian. The importance of this only became apparent after the 2022 coalition crisis and the replacement of the Heger government with a technical cabinet lead by Ludovít Ódor.

The coalition crisis led to the announcement of early elections in September 2023 and the conflict between the coalition partners made Robert Fico's *revanche* possible. With the announcement of early elections, Fico's party Smer-SD clearly led in the polls. Because of the high possibility of Fico's victory, Ódor's government stepped up the transfer of arms from the Slovak army's warehouse to Kyiv. The most difficult was the transfer of MiG-29 fighter jets, which Robert Fico tried his best to disrupt, even threatening the Slovak government with criminal prosecution (it was legally unclear whether the technical government had the authority to make such a transfer).

Ultimately though, Fico was only successful at blocking the last military package that the Ódor government planned to hand over between the parliamentary elections and the formation of the new government. The transfer of this package was blocked by President Zuzana Čaputová. According to her, such a move would have set an unpleasant precedent, as the winner of the parliamentary elections would oppose the transfer of military aid to Kyiv.

### Compromises with Fico

The victory of the Smer-SD party in the parliamentary elections and the formation of a new government coalition was perceived as a new freeze in Slovakia's relations with Ukraine. And the grounds on which such perceptions were made were very strong. Suffice it to recall that in the 2023 parliamentary elections, the Smer-SD staked its position on criticising Western aid to

Ukraine, proposing instead to increase pressure on Kyiv to sign a peace treaty with Russia. Fico was also strongly opposed to Ukraine's admission to NATO. The latter, he argued, would lead to a war between Russia and the NATO, in which Slovakia would have to participate. The point of no return, however, was Robert Fico's pre-election statement, in which he blamed Kyiv for starting the war: "The war in Ukraine did not start yesterday or last year. It began in 2014, when Ukrainian Nazis and fascists started killing Russian citizens in Donbas and Luhansk." In light of this, there were great fears that the new head of the Slovak government would pursue an openly anti-Ukrainian policy, similar to the current course of Hungary's Viktor Orban.

The first meeting between Fico and his Ukrainian counterpart Denys Shmyhal took place on January 24, 2024 and was supposed to provide answers about the new status quo of relations. By Slovak request, the meeting was not held in Kyiv but in Uzhhorod, a Ukrainian regional center located on the Slovak border. However, according to the Ukrainian side, the choice of venue was not only for logistical reasons. In the case of a visit to Kyiv, Fico would have had to visit the sites of war crimes committed by Russian soldiers, something that has become a mandatory part of Ukrainian ceremonial protocol in recent years. And such a step, in turn, would have been perceived negatively by Fico's voter base at home.

Moreover, in order to reassure his pro-Russian electorate, Fico made a number of anti-Ukrainian statements on the eve of his meeting with Shmyhal. In particular, he described Ukraine as a state under the "absolute influence of the United States" and also hinted that Ukraine would have to cede part of its territory to Russia: "There has to be some kind of compromise, which will be very painful for both sides. What are they [Ukrainians] expecting? That the Russians will leave Crimea, Donbas and Luhansk? This is unrealistic," he said.

But contrary to his public statements, the meeting did not take place in a hostile atmosphere. At the beginning of the meeting, Fico made it clear that his statements were aimed only at the domestic Slovak audience. And that it would have no impact on real relations with Ukraine. As a result, the parties agreed that Slovakia would stop the transfer of weapons to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, but would not cancel commercial orders for their production. These orders include a contract for the production of 16 Zuzana, two self-propelled howitzers (financed by Germany, Denmark, and Norway), ammunition from ZVS Holding (almost all of whose products are supplied to Ukraine), as well as the hub of the German company KMV, which operates in Slovakia near the border with Ukraine and maintains and repairs the Western armored vehicles of the AFU—and

which Kyiv even plans to expand. What's more, and very importantly for Kyiv, Fico publicly stated that he would not block Ukraine from joining the EU.

The Slovak prime minister insisted on extending the transit of Russian gas through the Ukrainian gas transport system. The gas transit did not stop even due to the full-scale war; however, the current Ukrainian–Russian contract expires at the end of 2024 and Kyiv has repeatedly said that it is not going to continue it. In a private conversation with the author, a senior Ukrainian government source said that Bratislava's conditions are not completely unacceptable to Kyiv: "I can say for sure that there will be no more new direct gas agreements between Ukraine and Russia. But if Slovakia agrees with Russia to buy gas at the Ukrainian–Russian border, we may well conclude a separate gas transit contract with them. For us, it is fundamentally important only that this contract is not concluded with Russia."

The senior official also framed Kyiv's expectations of relations with Slovakia. "If Fico does not try to veto issues important to us, as [Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor] Orban is doing now, we will have to ignore his anti-Ukrainian statements." It seems that this formula is still in effect between Kyiv and Bratislava.

In particular, after the first meeting between the two prime ministers, Fico repeatedly made unfriendly statements about Ukraine. However, the second meeting between Fico and Shmyhal, which took place on 11 April in the Slovakian border town of Michalovce (where the aforementioned KMV repair centre is located), was also quite constructive. It should also be noted that Slovak Defence Minister Robert Kaliniak, who has the unofficial status of "chief arms dealer," was also part of the delegation. And this fact shows that in the end—and despite the anti-Ukrainian statements of the Slovak Prime Minister—the commercial interest for Slovak arms sales to Kyiv will probably only grow and result in new contracts.

## Conclusion

The victory of Robert Fico in 2023, as well as the victory of his political ally Peter Pellegrini (who also used anti-Ukrainian messages in his campaign) in the 2024 presidential elections, created the impression that most Slovaks are tired of Ukraine and want peace—at the cost of territorial concessions from Kyiv toward Russia. However, this is not the case, as recently shown by a public initiative launched in Slovakia in April 2024 to collect funds to buy ammunition for the AFU. One of the initiators of the campaign was 99-year-old Otto Szymko, a Holocaust survivor who took part in the Slovak uprising against the Nazis in 1944. In just 12 days of fundraising, more than 60,000 Slovak citizens had raised almost EUR 3.9 million to finance the Czech

initiative to buy artillery ammunition for Ukraine. The amount came as a surprise even to the organizers of the fundraiser and gives hope that even under the

current difficult political circumstances, a new warming of relations between Ukraine and Slovakia is on the horizon.

#### *About the Author*

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## Friends or Foes: What is Going on in Ukrainian–Hungarian Relations after the Russian Invasion?

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### **Abstract**

Since 2017, Ukrainian–Hungarian relations have been experiencing a deep crisis. The diplomatic tensions between Kyiv and Budapest, which began with the issue of the rights of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine, has never really been limited to this issue. Today, the rights of the Hungarian minority seem to be a pretext rather than a cause. The diplomatic crisis from the very beginning has been orchestrated, fueled, and exploited by Russia. Every time when Ukrainian–Hungarian relations have reached their lowest point, another escalation had happened and these relations have fallen to a new “lowest” point, deepening the crisis. Even the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine did not change the situation. However, the successful resistance of Russian aggression thanks to Western support and the beginning of Ukraine's accession to the EU have created the preconditions for at least normalizing Ukrainian–Hungarian relations. This article analyzes the key milestones of the Ukrainian–Hungarian relations since the fall of 2021—less than six months before the Russian invasion.

### **The Illusion of Normalization before the Full-scale Russian Invasion**

While Vladimir Putin was preparing the invasion of Ukraine in 2021, Ukrainian–Hungarian relations were—surprisingly enough, after years of tensions—seeming to enter a new phase of normalization.

Kyiv and Budapest seemed to be close to a compromise on education for the Hungarian minority. It was particularly this issue that actually triggered the Ukrainian–Hungarian diplomatic confrontation in September 2017, after Ukraine adopted a new law on education that has ever since been criticized by Hungary. During the first nine months of 2021, three meetings of an inter-agency working group on education took place, with foreign ministers Dmytro Kuleba and Péter Szijjártó (despite the lack of “chemistry” between them) jointly traveling to Donbas and calling for peace. The govern-

ments of both countries were even preparing to restart the intergovernmental commission on national minority rights, which had not met for almost 10 years. The ground for this was that in 2022 the 5-year transition period stipulated by the new Ukrainian legislation on education was coming to an end, and it was important to determine how ethnic Hungarians in Zakarpattia would be educated. Secondly, both sides were exhausted by the previous years of confrontation and deadlock. They did not need more confrontation and escalation at the moment. Viktor Orban was immersed in a domestic election campaign, in which he decided to run under the banner of protecting Hungarian families and children from LGBTQ+, while Volodymyr Zelenskyy's priority was Russian military and diplomatic escalation.

Third, the issue of education was localized from the broad and highly conflictual agenda of Ukrainian–Hun-

garian relations, especially once this educational portfolio got into the hands of depoliticized and more professionalized circles from both sides. Fourth, international partners, primarily through NATO, put pressure on Hungary to finally normalize relations with Ukraine, while Russia was busy preparing to invade Ukraine and blackmailing the West, rather than stoking the Ukrainian–Hungarian tensions.

However, this normalization of Ukrainian–Hungarian relations ended in just another escalation.

On September 27, 2021 Hungary signed a new 15-year supply contract with Gazprom in Budapest. According to the contract, Hungary was to receive 4.5 billion cubic meters of gas from Russia per year, which is about half of the country's total demand. The key point was that under the terms of the new contract, gas would go to Hungary not through Ukraine (which benefited financially from the transit), as it had been before, but bypassing it through Austria and Serbia as a continuation of the Turkish Stream. Russia's motives at that time are now more than clear.

Hungary signed this contract two days before a planned meeting of the joint Ukrainian–Hungarian intergovernmental commission on economic cooperation, chaired by Péter Szijjártó and Dmytro Kuleba, was to take place in Budapest.

It was predictable that the Ukrainian side, which had already been advised by its Western partners to “dig trenches,” announced a demarche and asked the European Commission to verify the Hungarian contract with Gazprom.

Russia instantly seized the moment and conducted several waves of information operations simultaneously in Ukraine and Hungary between September and December 2021. And the key difference from all the earlier ones was that now Russia was no longer just speculating on such sensitive topics for Ukraine and Hungary as minority rights or separatism, but was promoting a scenario of a military clash between Ukraine and Hungary on ethnic grounds. In fact, this is the same topic Russia used as a cover for its aggression against Ukraine in both 2014 too.

The Russian campaigns of September–December 2021<sup>1</sup> in the Ukrainian and Hungarian information space were based on two narratives: First, Ukraine will try to take revenge on Hungary for its new gas deal with Gazprom by putting pressure on the ethnic Hungarian community living in Zakarpattia—up to and including “ethnic cleansing.” Second, Hungary has decided to redeploy its troops from the west to the east of the country,

to the border with Ukraine, and is ready to deploy special forces in Zakarpattia to protect its minority.

Such campaigns should not be underestimated. Unfortunately, they have a real impact on public opinion. This is evidenced by the results of a sociological survey conducted by the Democratic Initiatives Foundation in Ukraine in November 2021,<sup>2</sup> according to which 41.4% of Ukrainians think that Hungary's current policy toward the Hungarian minority residing in Zakarpattia—particularly with respect to financing schools, teachers, and grants for entrepreneurs—“aims at preparing a possible annexation and occupation of these territories to Hungary” (see Figure 1 on p. 18).

This escalation was further spun up by the fact that on November 18, 2021, Putin awarded Péter Szijjártó with the Order of Friendship and on February 1, 2022, Viktor Orban came to Moscow to meet with Vladimir Putin.

Thus, on the eve of the Russian invasion, Ukrainian–Hungarian relations once again “hit rock bottom,” in slang terms, reaching a new low. However, even this bottom would fall out.

### **Russia Has Won: Ukraine Fears Invasion from the West**

A new escalation in Ukrainian–Hungarian relations occurred even before Russian troops crossed the Ukrainian border on the night of February 24, 2022. The trigger was the statement of the then Hungarian Defense Minister Tibor Benkő on February 22, 2022 about the relocation of Hungarian troops to the border with Ukraine, after Vladimir Putin recognized the independence of the so-called LPR and DPR.

Furthermore, on the first day of the Russian invasion, the information that some Hungarian-speaking communities and municipalities in the Berehove district of the Zakarpattia region were planning to hold a referendum on joining Hungary was widely and virally spread online, initially via mainly anonymous Telegram channels and on social media such as Facebook. This information was refuted by the leader of the Hungarian Democratic Union of Ukraine, László Zubánics. Moreover, on February 25, the International Spokesperson of the Hungarian Government Zoltán Kovács refuted this information again, calling it a provocation. There was and still is no factual evidence that there have been any attempts to hold such a referendum, and representatives of the Hungarian community in Ukraine and Zakarpattia region, as well as the region's leadership, insist that nothing like this was planned in the region.

1 More details about these special operations can be found in the debunkings done by the ICES task force in cooperation with Infopost media outlet [https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/project/2022/bridges/article\\_1.html](https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/project/2022/bridges/article_1.html)

2 For more details <https://infopost.media/shho-ukrayinczi-dumayut-pro-krayiny-czentralnoyi-yevropy-soczdoslidzhennya-rezultaty-yakogozmushuyut-zamyslytys/>

In Ukraine, this news was perceived by many as Hungary's preparations for a military operation against Ukraine, in particular intervention into Zakarpattia, just as Russian disinformation had been modeling how to do in Ukraine for years in the run-up to the invasion. This is confirmed by sociological surveys of public opinion in Ukraine both before (cited above) and after the Russian invasion. Thus, by February 2023, more than 40% of Ukrainians were convinced<sup>3</sup> that Hungary intends to do the same as Russia and to use the ethnic issue as a pretext for aggression against Ukraine (see Figure 2 on p. 19).

### Between Escalations and the Illusion of a New “Détente”

Although there is a lot of speculation about the plot between Viktor Orbán and Vladimir Putin, the Hungarian prime minister was actually busy with other things at the time. There were parliamentary elections in Hungary and, at the time of the Russian invasion, the campaign was in full swing. Moreover, Viktor Orbán and his team were not sure of their absolute victory.

Before the election on April 3, the EU adopted four sanction packages against Russia, and Hungary supported them all. However, Viktor Orbán and his team said that they will not allow the transportation of weapons for Ukraine through the territory of Hungary because it would seem to mean that “Hungary will be dragged into the war” and “this is not our war.”<sup>4</sup>

On the eve of the election, Volodymyr Zelenskyy twice appealed to Viktor Orbán, criticizing him for his support of Russia and for his reluctance to help Ukraine. In reaction, Péter Szijjártó and Viktor Orbán accused Ukraine of interfering in Hungary's upcoming election.<sup>5</sup>

These are just a few of the many episodes of mutual political accusations during Hungary's electoral period.<sup>6</sup>

It was hard to imagine with such bilateral relations that Hungary would support the granting of EU candidacy status for Ukraine in June 2022. But Viktor Orbán did.

The European Council's decision of June 23, 2022 to grant Ukraine EU candidate status came a few days after the European Commission recommended it, but already on June 21, following a phone talk between Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Viktor Orbán, it became clear that Hungary would not veto anything.

Along with the candidate status, Ukraine also received a list of “homework” with seven reform conditions. As expected, one of the seven conditions was to “finalise the reform of the legal framework for national minorities currently under preparation as recommended by the Venice Commission, and adopt immediate and effective implementation mechanisms.” This is how Viktor Orbán kept leverage.

Until the end of 2022, there was a relative lull in Ukrainian–Hungarian relations, and even the illusion of a new “détente” emerged. However, at that time, neither Kyiv nor the Budapest wanted anything more and had no particular desire to truly normalize relations. There was no dialogue. Viktor Orbán waited patiently, maintaining his leverage, while Volodymyr Zelenskyy was deep in counteroffensive mode.

A new escalation occurred in early 2023, when Hungary tried to remove nine Russian oligarchs from the EU sanctions list<sup>7</sup> and Viktor Orbán called Ukraine “no man's land” and the new Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, a real crisis between Kyiv and Budapest arose in June 2023, when it was revealed that Russia had handed over 11 Ukrainian prisoners of war of alleged Hungarian origin to Hungary under the guise of interchurch dialogue.<sup>9</sup> This was done without the involvement or even informing of Ukraine.

In August 2023, Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his Hungarian counterpart Katalin Novák met in Kyiv after being unable to do so for several months. At that meeting they talked face-to-face without an interpreter and afterward both sides reported that the meeting was very good. Prior to the meeting, the Hungarian president had signed an agreement naming Fedir Shandor as Ukrainian ambassador to Hungary. Once again, there was a sense that Ukrainian–Hungarian relations were normalizing. This looked especially optimistic four months before the EU summit, which was supposed to consider the opening of negotiations on Ukraine's membership. But once again it was just an illusion.

### The Historic EU Summit

In early November 2023, about a month before the EU summit, Viktor Orbán's team launched another offensive. After the European Commission, headed by Ursula von

3 For more details <https://kyivindependent.com/survey-41-4-of-respondents-think-hungary-could-make-territorial-claims-against-ukraine/>

4 It is important to note that according to the decision of the Hungarian government of March 7, it is prohibited to transport weapons for Ukraine directly across the Ukrainian–Hungarian border. However, it is not prohibited to transport weapons through the territory of Hungary for later transfer, for example, to Slovakia or Romania within the framework of the European Peace Facility. In addition, the transfer of non-lethal means directly across the Ukrainian–Hungarian border is not prohibited. The Hungarian government usually avoids this explanation, and still does. <https://bit.ly/3IdMWS0>

5 <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-zelenskyy-business-europe-peter-szijjarto-3fb4684dc028688c3cd544ee661d7e43>

6 <https://www.direkt36.hu/en/ilyen-volt-belulrol-az-ellenzeki-kampany-osszeomlasa/>

7 <https://www.rferl.org/a/hungary-eu-sanctions-list-russia-ukraine/32227730.html>

8 <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-summon-hungarian-envoy-over-unacceptable-remarks-by-orban-2023-01-27/>

9 <https://www.dw.com/de/ungarns-seltsamer-kriegsgefangenen-deal-mit-russland-wir-sollten-sagen-wir-seien-ungarn/a-68677681>



der Leyen, recommended opening negotiations with Ukraine, Budapest proclaimed that Ukraine was not ready for negotiations, had not fulfilled the conditions for their opening, was totally corrupt, and could only count on “a privileged partnership,” whatever that meant.

At the end of November, Charles Michel unexpectedly arrived in Kyiv and immediately went afterward to Budapest to meet Viktor Orban. At the beginning of December, Michel decided to cut short his visit to China and Emmanuel Macron invited Viktor Orban to dinner in Paris—all trying to assuage Viktor Orban’s threats to veto the opening of accession talks with Ukraine.

On December 8, 2023, the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada passed amendments to seven laws, satisfying all the key recommendations of the Venice Commission, and thus the decisive criterion Hungary claimed Ukraine had still not met. In short, the key change was that Ukraine allowed Hungarians to study at school entirely in their native language, with the exception of four subjects, namely the Ukrainian language, Ukrainian literature, Ukrainian history, and the defense of Ukraine, which should be taught in the state language.

Based on these unprecedented changes in Ukrainian legislation, the leaders of the Hungarian community in Transcarpathia wrote a separate joint letter to Viktor Orban calling on him not to block the opening of negotiations about Ukraine’s accession.<sup>10</sup> This became an important episode in Ukrainian–Hungarian relations because ethnic Hungarian community leaders actually opposed Viktor Orban’s position.

On December 14, 2023, at the EU summit in Brussels, the leaders of the EU decided to open accession talks with Ukraine. This decision, which had to be made unanimously, became historic for several reasons. One of them is that Viktor Orban left the room during the voting, either on the pretext of drinking coffee or going to the restroom.

Initially, Orban came to Brussels with the clear desire to veto the decision to open accession talks with Ukraine. Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s team and many others were expecting just such an outcome, even though Ukraine adopted the necessary changes to the legislation on the protection of minority rights.

Eventually, thanks to the well-coordinated play of “good cop, bad cop” by Olaf Scholz, Emmanuel Macron, and Giorgia Meloni, Viktor Orban failed to veto not only the opening of negotiations with Ukraine, but also the next critical EU decision for Ukraine, namely the allocation of EUR 50 billion in aid at the EU summit in January 2024. At the same time, Budapest contin-

ues to insist that the rights of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine are still oppressed. During his last visit to Ukraine in January 2024, Péter Szijjártó outlined a new list of 11 requests to Ukraine on this matter.

As of June 2024 Hungary is—again—blocking approximately €9 billion for Ukraine within the European Peace Facility (EPF), using not the ethnic issue as the pretext, but an alleged “witch hunt” against Hungarian companies in Ukraine. At the same time, Hungary threatened to block approval of the negotiation framework with Ukraine in June (because of the national minority issue), but did not in the end.

In this case, Hungary’s refusal to veto looks very logical. It is based on active consultations between Kyiv and Budapest behind closed doors in recent months and a “lengthy and meaningful” call between Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Viktor Orban in May.

The same was true with Orbán’s visit to Kyiv in the first days of Hungary’s presidency in the EU. While it looked sensational and confusing, at the same time it seemed also a rational and even constituent step in that situation. But Orbán’s next destinations in his so-called “peace mission,” especially Moscow, bring us back to the core of the Hungarian prime minister’s logic in Ukrainian–Hungarian relations. For him, these relations are just an instrument in geopolitical games<sup>11</sup> with Russia, the US, the EU, and China—all simultaneously. That is why it was so easy for Viktor Orban to be very polite and friendly in Kyiv, support the opening of a Ukrainian school in Hungary, and speak very constructively about Ukraine’s progress in ensuring the rights of the Hungarian minority, as well as his readiness to sign a new interstate agreement with Ukraine.

## Conclusion

Since 2017, Ukrainian–Hungarian relations have been experiencing the most systemic and profound crisis in the history of their diplomatic relations. Conflict over the rights of the Hungarian minority are only a pretext, a leitmotif, and a trigger for this crisis, but not the cause. Initially, this crisis was caused by the neglect of bilateral relations on both sides and the inability to resolve it bilaterally. Neither Hungary nor Ukraine has had a full-fledged vision and policy toward the other.

Viktor Orbán quickly instrumentalized this crisis to play first NATO, the US, and Russia and now mainly the EU, Russia, and China, using Ukraine as a pretext and a “hostage” for negotiations, bargaining, and blackmail. For example, Viktor Orbán is currently trying to use Ukraine as leverage to fight the EU Commission for

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/eng/news/2023/12/11/7175363/>

<sup>11</sup> For more details <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/hungarian-pm-orban-poses-as-unlikely-peace-maker-for-russias-ukraine-war/>

funds and personally against Ursula von der Leyen to undermine her presidency. Before launching the Patriots for Europe group, Orbán used the topic of Ukraine to negotiate with the ECR group in the European Parliament, trying to exchange his veto on European integration and support for Ukraine for Fidesz's membership in this group. These negotiations were primarily with Giorgia Meloni, the Italian prime minister and informal leader of the ECR. From the Ukrainian perspective, Hungary is more of an obstacle to be removed than a partner-neighbor. Consequently, Kyiv's practice of occasional "fix[es] and ad hoc diplomacy" rather than classic diplomacy. A separate dynamic is added by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's personal ambition to "to put pressure on Hungary" so that it finally abandons its pro-Russian position and openly declares its support for Ukraine. Given these two factors, the Hungarian portfolio is now not in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, but in the office of the President and personally with Andriy Yermak.

Despite his landslide victory with the fourth constitutional majority in a row, Viktor Orbán won this mandate primarily on the basis of "peace," "appeasing Russia," and an anti-Western platform. To abandon it and change course radically is extremely risky and politically illogical for Viktor Orbán, even under the great pressure from the West or with his own great will. The

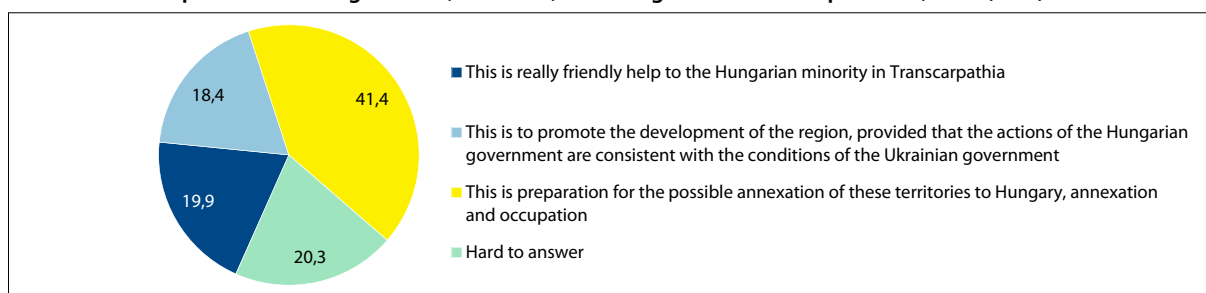
same is true of Ukraine as topic and pretext: there is no reason for Viktor Orbán to abandon his leverage over and link with Ukraine which is the ethnic minority topic. Ukraine's attitude toward Hungary today is largely negative due to Viktor Orbán's pro-Russian stance and Russian trauma, as the Kremlin used the same ethnic issue that Hungary emphasizes to start a genocidal war against Ukraine. At the moment, conspiracy theories are very popular in public opinion in Ukraine and among the elites that Hungary has territorial claims to Ukrainian Zakarpattia and was preparing to invade alongside Russia in February 2022.

The Ukrainian–Hungarian diplomatic crisis has been orchestrated, fueled, and exploited by Russia from the very beginning. Since 2014, Russia has been continuously and systematically investing a large amount of resources in provoking interethnic confrontation between Ukrainians and Hungarians in Zakarpattia, as well as diplomatic confrontation between Kyiv and Budapest. Through hybrid influence and disinformation, Russia has managed to create an agenda for both countries (e.g., territorial claims, separatism, etc.), as well as stereotypes (i.e., Hungarian revanchists and allies of the Russians on the one hand and Ukrainian neo-Nazis seeking to assimilate Hungarians on the other). Moreover, Russia was already managing to do this before Ukrainian–Hungarian tensions publicly started in 2017.

#### About the Author

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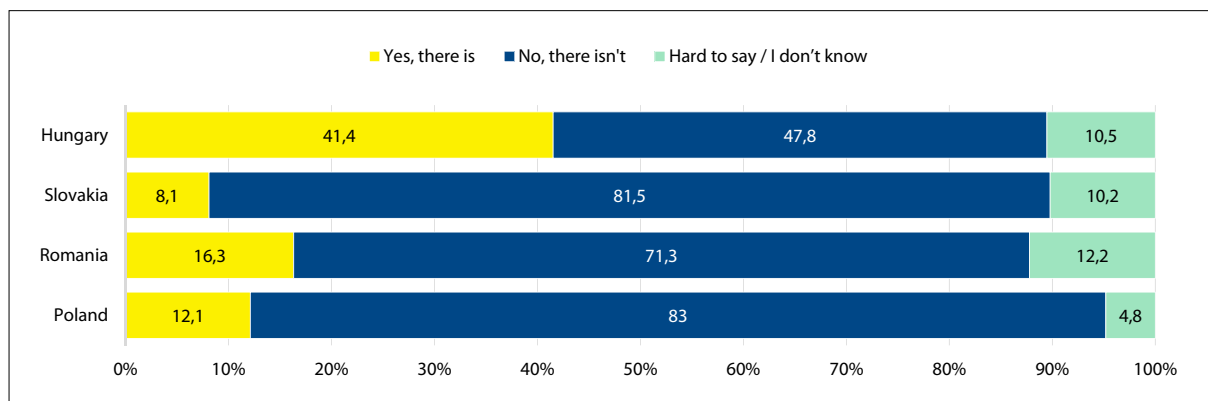
**Figure 1: What Do You Think about Hungary's Current Policy towards the Hungarian National Minority in Transcarpathia—Funding Schools, Teachers, Providing Grants to Entrepreneurs, etc.? (in %)**



Note: The nationwide survey was conducted from October 22 to November 12, 2021, using the CATI method (computer-assisted telephone interviews) based on a random sample of mobile phone numbers in all regions of Ukraine, except for the territories temporarily not controlled by the Ukrainian authorities - the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and certain districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The sample is representative of the adult population (aged 18 and older) of Ukraine. As a result of the field stage, 2003 questionnaires were collected. The statistical sampling error (with a probability of 0.95 and taking into account the design effect of 1.1) does not exceed 2.4% for indicators close to 50%, 2.1% for indicators close to 25%, 1.5% for indicators close to 10%.

Source: Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation: *Ukraine as Part Central Europe: What Ukrainians think about it*, 13.12.2021, <https://dif.org.ua/article/ukraine-as-part-central-europe-what-ukrainians-think-about-it>.

**Figure 2: For Many Years, Russia Has Used Issues of History and “Protection of the Russian-Speaking Population” to Divide Ukrainian Society and Make Territorial Claims. In Your Opinion, Is There a Similar Threat from Each of These Countries Now? (in %)**



Note: The survey was conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology on the order of the Institute for Central European Strategy using the CATI method based on a random sample of mobile phone numbers. 2,002 respondents were surveyed. The survey was conducted with adults (aged 18 and older) citizens of Ukraine who, at the time of the survey, lived on the territory of Ukraine (within the boundaries controlled by the authorities of Ukraine until February 24, 2022). The sample did not include residents of territories that were not temporarily controlled by the authorities of Ukraine until February 24, 2022 (AR Crimea, the city of Sevastopol, certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions), and the survey was not conducted with citizens who left the country after February 24, 2022. The field stage lasted from February 14 to 22, 2023.

Source: Unpublished survey by the Institute for Central European Strategy.

## A Tale of Two Neighbors: Romania and Ukraine’s Journey from Tension to Alliance

Sergiy Gerasymchuk (Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism”, Kyiv)

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### Abstract

The relations between Ukraine and Romania have been marked by historical tensions, mutual stereotypes, and the evolving dynamics of the Russian war against Ukraine. From historical border disputes to shared struggles for democracy and European integration, the trajectory of Ukraine–Romania relations offers a compelling study of diplomacy, regional politics, and the quest for stability and alignment in an ever-changing European landscape.

### Mutual Misperceptions and Border Disputes

The historical relationship between Ukraine and Romania is characterized by a complex web of diplomatic engagements and regional positioning. Historically, Romania has primarily focused its foreign policy on Moldova, a nation that shares deep linguistic and historical ties with Romania. This relationship often came at the expense of deeper ties with other neighboring countries, particularly Ukraine. Romania’s stance has been shaped by its perception of itself as a bastion of Latin culture and heritage in a region predominantly influenced by Slavic cultures. This self-perception as a “Roman island in a Slavic sea” has nuanced its diplomatic approaches and influenced its interactions with Ukraine, creating a backdrop of cautious

engagement overshadowed by cultural and historical distinctions.

Despite their geographical proximity and shared challenges, Ukraine and Romania have historically viewed each other through a prism of mutual suspicion and entrenched stereotypes. Both nations harbored similar negative perceptions toward the other, seeing the other as impoverished, corrupt, and unreliable. These stereotypes not only hindered the development of a cooperative relationship but also reflected a broader issue of mutual distrust that has been difficult to overcome.

The drawn-out process of border demarcation further exacerbated these tensions. A notable point of contention was the delimitation of the maritime boundary around Serpent Island, a dispute that festered until it

required arbitration by the International Court of Justice in 2009. This prolonged dispute served as a focal point of the mutual lack of trust, with each nation struggling to secure its own territorial claims.

### **A Shift in Perspective: The Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity**

The Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity in 2014 marked a significant turning point in Ukraine–Romania relations. As events unfolded in Kyiv, many Romanians saw echoes of their own 1989 revolution which resulted in overthrow of Nicolae Ceaușescu, and particularly the revolutionary spirit that began in Timișoara. This historical parallel evoked a sense of shared struggle and resilience against oppressive regimes, fostering a newfound empathy and connection between Romanians and Ukrainians.

The Revolution of Dignity not only reshaped Romania's view of Ukraine but also highlighted the distinct paths chosen by Ukraine and Russia. As Ukraine demonstrated a clear desire to move toward European integration and away from Russian influence, Romania found more common ground with its neighbor. This realignment was particularly significant given Romania's historically strained relations with Russia. The clear distinction between Ukrainian and Russian political trajectories provided Romania with a fresh perspective and an impetus to foster a more supportive relationship with Ukraine.

A significant milestone in the evolving relationship between Ukraine and Romania was reached in July 2014, when Romania became the first European Union country to ratify the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement. This act was not merely procedural but symbolic, marking a decisive step in Romania's support for Ukraine's closer integration with the EU. In being the first to ratify the agreement, Romania demonstrated its strong commitment to Ukraine's European aspirations and a clear acknowledgment of its place within the European community.

This gesture of solidarity was also a testament to Romania's acceptance of Ukraine as a part of the European family, helping to bridge the gap created by historical tensions and mutual stereotypes. It underscored a shared vision for the future, one rooted in democratic values, mutual respect, and collective security. Romania's leadership in this regard set an example for other EU countries and solidified its role as a key supporter of Ukraine's EU integration.

### **Romania's Multifaceted Support for Ukraine during the War**

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 dramatically reshaped the geopolitical landscape of

Eastern Europe and further intensified the bond between Ukraine and Romania. As Ukraine faced unprecedented challenges, the response from Romania was both immediate and profound. The Romanian people—stirred by a new wave of empathy and solidarity—played a pivotal role in providing refuge and assistance to Ukrainians fleeing the war. Volunteer efforts at the Ukraine–Romania border were a testament to this deepened connection, as Romanians offered essential support and comfort to their war-torn neighbors.

Beyond humanitarian aid, Romania also played a crucial strategic role in supporting Ukraine's economic stability. With Ukrainian ports blocked by Russian forces, Romania facilitated the export of Ukrainian goods through its territory, ensuring that Ukraine could maintain some level of economic activity despite the blockade. This support was not just logistical but also a clear political signal of Romania's commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and economic independence.

Furthermore, Romania has been a staunch advocate for Ukraine's integration into European and Atlantic structures. In unconditionally supporting Ukraine's aspirations for EU and NATO membership, Romania has emerged as a key ally in Ukraine's efforts to align more closely with Western institutions. This alignment is seen not only as a pathway to enhancing Ukraine's security and prosperity, but also as a step toward stabilizing the broader region.

The direct interaction of high-ranking officials from both Ukraine and Romania has underscored the critical role of diplomacy and international law in the relationship between the two countries, particularly considering the tragic events unfolding since the Russian invasion. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's address to the Romanian parliament on April 4, 2022, was a focal moment, highlighting the gravity of the situation in Ukraine. In his speech, he detailed the civilian atrocities in Bucha and discussed potential evidence for a future tribunal to address Russian war crimes, stressing the importance of accountability in the international arena.

President Zelenskyy also took the opportunity to express gratitude for Romania's substantial support in hosting Ukrainian refugees, a gesture that has not only provided immediate relief, but also strengthened the bonds between the two nations. This acknowledgment serves as a testament to Romania's commitment to humanitarian aid and its alignment with European values of solidarity and support.

Further reinforcing this commitment, the then Romanian Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucă and the then Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Marcel Ciolacu (now holding the prime minister's office), made a significant visit to Irpin on April 27, 2022. This visit was not

only symbolic of Romania's support but also substantive, as Prime Minister Ciucă voiced Romania's backing for an international investigation into the war crimes committed, emphasizing the role that Romania could play in facilitating justice. Subsequently, Romanian president Klaus Iohannis's visit to Irpin in June 2022 highlighted similar themes, with a strong call for the prosecution of those responsible for the atrocities.

These visits and statements are indicative of Romania's proactive stance in the international community regarding the Russian war against Ukraine. By supporting Ukraine at multiple levels—from humanitarian aid to advocating for justice in international forums—Romania demonstrates a comprehensive approach in its foreign policy that champions human rights and international law.

Since the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, Romania has emerged as a crucial ally for Ukraine, demonstrating its support through a variety of significant initiatives that span humanitarian aid, economic partnerships, and diplomatic advocacy. One of the most tangible manifestations of this support was the establishment of a logistics hub in Romania, which has been pivotal in coordinating the delivery of humanitarian aid to Ukraine. This hub underscores Romania's strategic importance and commitment to aiding its neighbor during this critical time.

Economically, Romania has played a vital role in helping sustain Ukraine's agricultural sector amidst the war. In 2022, the export of Ukrainian agricultural products through Romania not only continued but flourished, soaring from a modest USD 1.8 million in 2021 to an impressive USD 1.24 billion. This dramatic increase reflects the adaptation and resilience of both nations under trying circumstances. Additionally, Romania became Ukraine's main fuel supplier in 2022, with imports expanding thirtyfold to reach one million tons, including an additional 250,000 tons transited through Romania. Major Romanian companies like OMV Petrom and Rompetrol contributed about 40% of Ukraine's fuel needs, further embedding Romania as a key economic lifeline for Ukraine. In September 2024, Romania also joined a group of NATO countries that decided to support Ukrainian air defense by donating a Patriot missile-defense system to Ukraine.

In terms of political and diplomatic support, Romania has been a staunch advocate for Ukraine's European integration. This includes backing proposals from the European Commission to offer Ukraine a clear European perspective as well as supporting Ukraine's aspirations within the EU framework. The establishment of a new trilateral cooperation format with Ukraine and Moldova in September 2022 further demonstrates Romania's proactive approach in

regional collaboration, aimed at bolstering mutual support and security.

The cultural and historical bonds were also highlighted when the Romanian parliament, in a joint session of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, adopted a political declaration recognizing the Holodomor as a crime against the Ukrainian people and humanity. This move not only solidifies the historical acknowledgment, but also strengthens the moral and cultural ties between the two nations.

On the international stage, Romania has consistently voiced its support for Ukraine. At the 29<sup>th</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council meeting, Romanian Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu called for an immediate cessation of Russian aggression and a full withdrawal of its forces from Ukrainian territory.

Moreover, the bilateral agreement signed on the implementation of the Espoo Convention between Ukraine's and Romania's environmental ministers illustrates a commitment to sustainable and responsible environmental governance, showcasing yet another dimension of the deepening partnership.

These multifaceted efforts not only demonstrate Romania's unwavering support for Ukraine, but also highlight the dynamic and evolving nature of bilateral relations that have become increasingly strategic amidst the current geopolitical turbulence. The total trade turnover between Ukraine and Romania—which more than doubled from USD 2.3 billion in 2021 to USD 5.35 billion in 2022—epitomizes this growing relationship, cemented further by shared interests and mutual challenges.

In 2023, Romania further solidified its role as a staunch advocate for Ukraine on the global stage. By joining the declaration of the G7 countries in support of Ukraine, presented during the NATO summit in Vilnius, Romania aligned itself with the world's leading democracies in backing Ukraine amidst ongoing aggression. This alignment not only reinforced Romania's commitment to global security norms, but also underscored its leadership position within the international community in responding to geopolitical crises.

Moreover, Romania deepened its direct security cooperation with Ukraine by becoming the ninth country to initiate bilateral security talks. These discussions are pivotal as they not only focus on immediate security concerns, but also prepare the groundwork for long-term defense cooperation.

These developments in 2023 demonstrated a sustained commitment by Romania to support Ukraine through both diplomatic avenues and practical, bilateral engagements. Romania's actions reflect a comprehensive strategy aimed at ensuring the security and integration of Ukraine into broader European and international

frameworks, promoting peace, stability, and prosperity in the region.

Furthermore, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha visited Romania on September 18, 2024 making his first official visit to a foreign state since entering office. This was another symbolic demonstration of elevating relations between the two countries to a strategic level.

### **Conclusion: Romania's Continued Commitment amidst Political Flux**

In 2024, Romania is poised at a significant crossroads, with the full cycle of elections—parliamentary and presidential—set to take place. Amidst this political backdrop, certain political parties, notably AUR and SOS, have begun to question the existing support for Ukraine and have even raised controversial territorial

claims. For example, in January 2024 Claudiu Tarziu, one of the leaders of Romania's far-right AUR party, said his country should "reunite" with Moldova and the Ukrainian border regions of Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, and Zakarpattia. Despite the growing popularity of these political factions, they still do not surpass the mainstream liberal democrats and social democrats in strength. Consequently, it is unlikely that there will be a significant shift in Romania's official stance toward Ukraine. As the proverb goes, "A steady ship can weather any storm." Thus, while the political winds may shift, Romania's foundational policies of supporting its neighbor and endorsing its integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures are expected to endure, reflecting a deep-rooted commitment to stability and solidarity in the region.

#### *About the Author*

Sergiy Gerasymchuk graduated from Kyiv-Mohyla Academy with an MA in Political Science and is a graduate of the Estonian School of Diplomacy. He is the Deputy Executive Director at the Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism" (Ukraine). He has been involved in political studies since 2001 and has experience working for the Secretariat of the Parliament of Ukraine and scientific research institutions under the President of Ukraine and the Security and Defense Council of Ukraine. As an expert, Sergiy Gerasymchuk cooperated with Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (HSFK), International Center for Democratic Transformation in Budapest (Hungary), and international Research Company GfK Ukraine. He also conducted research during research stays at Uppsala University (Sweden), Maria Skłodowska-Curie University (Poland), Justus-Liebig-University Giessen (Germany), and National University of Public Service (Hungary).

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## Ukraine and Moldova: Hidden Problems in Times of Solid Friendship

Sergiy Sydorenko (European Pravda, Kyiv)

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### Abstract

Ukraine–Moldova relations have never been as good as they are now. Both the government in Kyiv and the Ukrainian people appreciate the support and gratitude expressed by current Moldovan leadership including Maia Sandu. Both countries also feel bound together as they aspire towards EU membership. But this state of affairs is not guaranteed. Kyiv and Chişinău only achieved this point just recently; even in 2022 there were tough disagreements. Both sides must treat seriously the need to solve old, accumulated problems, otherwise relations could again deteriorate again.

### Good Neighbors with a Heap of Problems

Neighboring countries can have friendly relations. There are numerous examples of this in Europe. Still you would be hard pressed to find a pair of European countries sharing a common land border whose friendship doesn't have strings attached.

Moldova–Ukraine relations are full of these “strings” and have always been. Some even date back to events that happened long before the two countries declared independence in 1991. Since then, however, a bulk of new issues have appeared between Kyiv and Chişinău and many have been left unresolved. In fact, for three decades many governments in both countries opted to avoid making decisions, thus leaving the problems unsolved.

There were some exceptions—mainly in the areas where European partners pushed both capitals—but in general, from decade to decade, the two countries accumulated rather than overcame failures and blind spots in their relations. Even a short list of their bilateral issues looks impressive.

Among them are included contraband practices through “permeable” parts of the border; territorial and property disputes related to the Dniestrovsk-2 Hydro power plant near the border; disputes about the right to use the Palanka road (that connects the northern and southern parts of Odesa Oblast and goes through Moldovan territory), and which is crucially important for Ukraine; disputed property rights for some real estate in Ukraine claimed by Moldova; disputes on use of trans-border railroad infrastructure; electric energy and gas supply issues; ecologists' accusation about Ukraine's activity on the Dnister river—a key source of water for Moldova; disputes about the existence and status of the Moldovan diaspora in Ukraine (according to the last census (2001), there are ca. 260,000 Moldovans living in Ukraine, making Moldovans the third-largest ethnic minority group in Ukraine); and even historical disputes or borders. No less important, the mutual perception between the two societies is stained, and it was recently poisoned even more by politicians like Moldovan ex-president Igor Dodon, whom many in Kyiv

perceived as pro-Putin and anti-Ukrainian. Moreover, the participation of far-right Ukrainian activists in the 1992 Transnistrian war against Moldova has not been forgotten yet, either.

Given this background, it may sound surprising and paradoxical that bilateral relations between Ukraine and Moldova remained neutral or in some periods even friendly—even when bilateral problems touched areas of vital importance to the countries (especially for Moldova). The key to this friendship is simple and lays in corruption.

Some of the bilateral problems appeared to be financially beneficial to elites of both countries, especially those in Moldova. Furthermore, politicians used to control illegal trade or reselling energy, and to keep the status quo, everyone preferred to turn a blind eye to the other issues. The Russian role in this picture should be considered, too.

Many issues between Ukraine and Moldova are connected to Transnistria—a breakaway region in the east of Moldova along the Ukrainian border, and which has remained under de facto control of Russia since 1992. Since then, Russian military presence in Transnistria has served as a guarantee that Moldova will not try to restore its integrity and sovereignty over all its territory. This frozen conflict has remained an effective tool for Kremlin to restrain democratic development in both Moldova and Ukraine.

The Transnistria-related corrupted practices poisoning Moldovan–Ukrainian relations for almost three decades benefited Russia. And then, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

### The Road to the Big Change

To be precise, the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine was not the only turning point in recent Moldovan–Ukrainian relations.

First, the road was paved by the election of Volodymyr Zelenskyi as president of Ukraine in 2019. While this did not lead to immediate changes, it shouldn't be underestimated. The reason is not only Zelenskyi's high

popularity in Moldova—something quite unusual for election candidates abroad.

Not less important was that former Ukrainian leader Petro Poroshenko was extremely unpopular and had been demonized in the perception of both Moldovan political elites and the public. Some hatred came from Poroshenko's friendship and long-time business relations with the odious Moldovan oligarch Vlad Plahotniuc. At the same time, those in Moldova who consume Russian propaganda were fed by Kremlin-spread myths about Poroshenko.

All of this resulted in the hope in Moldovan society that the election of Zelenskyi would open a window for improved bilateral relations.

But to make the most of this opportunity, Moldova had to change leadership, too—to oust Dodon and his party leadership from parliament. For Kyiv, Dodon was a dealbreaker, as he made statements accepting the Russian occupation and annexation of Crimea (which turns any foreign politician into a political outcast for Ukraine). Zelenskyi's election did not change this approach. Finally, though, this obstacle was removed, too, with the election of Maia Sandu as President of Republic of Moldova in late 2020 and the landslide victory of her party in the parliamentary elections in mid-2021.

So, we might ask: Has a new era of Ukrainian–Moldovan relations started to emerge with the elections of the new presidents?

Not really.

Indeed, while bilateral discussions have intensified—there were several meetings on the highest level after a four-year pause—there was nothing more. Even regarding their approaches to EU integration, the two countries have chosen very different approaches. Before 2022, neither of the two countries had an officially recognized “European perspective.” While Ukrainians tried to push for changes in the EU attitude toward Ukraine, and demanded a new status, Moldovans instead focused on domestic policy and reforms with the apparent hope that the road to EU membership would eventually appear then.

This difference has led to frustration in Kyiv and was perceived by many as a sign that Sandu was avoiding a strong pro-Western stance. Consequently, the initial chemistry between two leaders cooled down. But after February 24, 2022 all of that did not matter.

Russia's full-scale invasion made Ukraine ready to renew relations with all partners. The actions of other countries *after* Russia's full-scale Russian invasion mattered more than anything before. But even then, some shades in relations with Chişinău were visible.

In early 2022, Zelenskyi and his team were quite angry at Sandu after she declined Kyiv's early plea to

transfer to Ukraine six old out-of-service Soviet MiG-29 fighter jets based at Mărculeşti airport in northern Moldova. The Moldovan army has no functional jets and does not need them, while the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) was desperately seeking spare parts to revive its fleet.

The reason for Sandu's refusal was clear: in February 2022 many thought that Ukraine would not survive for long and Moldova would be the next to see a Russian invasion. If Sandu had a track record of supplying weapons to the Ukrainian AFU, it would make matters worse. But for Ukraine, this explanation didn't cut it.

These tensions lasted for three months. By the end of spring—once the threat of a Russian invasion of Moldova had diminished—Chişinău gave up its position and multiple sources confirmed that Ukrainian technicians were granted access to jets. And in early June, a Ukrainian plane visited Mărculeşti airport. Officially, it was only for a technical lending with no purpose. Coincidentally at that time however, Moldovan–Ukrainian bilateral relations became better momentarily.

### A New Era of Partnership

Currently, relations between Kyiv and Chişinău are better than ever before. Past emotions have been left behind and both sides are benefitting from this. Also, Moldovan leadership have shown solid progress in understanding the threat posed by Russia and this has helped to create mutual trust. Politically, Moldova has also turned from loyalty to Moscow to a clearly pro-Ukrainian state.

Despite some delay, Chişinău has joined international anti-Russian sanctions; it supports Kyiv in all international forums; Moldovan authorities have begun fighting Russian propaganda channels; and Russia's diplomatic presence in Moldova has been cut to a historic low with some diplomats even being expelled from Chişinău.

Currently, there are no longer any reservations in Kyiv about Moldovan rhetoric regarding Russia, and Maia Sandu no longer misses a chance to praise the Ukrainian army and people, publicly stressing, that Moldova stays independent, free, and alive due to Ukrainian daily sacrifice. One may say that these are just words, but for Ukrainians it really matters.

When it comes to supporting Ukraine in times of war, Moldova also does a fairly amount, especially considering its size and capacity. There is no modern military weaponry in Moldova and no one expects Chişinău to produce it, but fuel supply does come to Ukraine through Moldovan territory and this feeds not only the Ukrainian people but also the AFU. Furthermore, the Moldovan government does its best to enforce the sanctions regime and cut supply chains that can end up



in the Russian military. Moldovan railways are used in full to export Ukrainian goods and border problems seem to be no longer problematic—a change after decades of dispute. Needless to say, for many Ukrainian refugees, flight through Moldova is an important route, and it works.

In return, Ukraine changed its approach to partnership with Moldova regarding their EU aspirations. In 2022, Ukrainian officials did not hide their discontent Moldova's fast-improving relations with the EU. Many in Kyiv said that Chişinău “jumped on the Ukrainian train” and got a candidate status “for nothing,” or just because the EU decided to link the Moldovan and Ukrainian files. However, this was emotional jealousy and it did not help Kyiv. In fact, Ukraine and Moldova are bound by geography. Together, they have more chances to successfully join the EU. In recent years, this jealousy no longer plays a role. Kyiv is ready to walk a joint path to EU membership.

The perception of Moldova in Ukrainian society has improved, too. While according to opinion polls in [2020](#), every fifth Ukrainian saw Moldova as a friendly state, in [2023](#) it was every second. The clear position of Sandu and her government on Russian aggression has also been duly noted and is respected in Ukraine.

But there still remains a topic which feeds misunderstanding in Ukrainian society about Moldova: this is the Transnistrian conflict.

### Transnistria and Other Strings Attached

First, some background is needed to understand the issue. The Transnistrian conflict dates back at least to 1989–1991 when the Soviet Union existing but in collapse, and national sentiments grew in some Soviet republics, including Moldova. At that time, some local leaders in Tiraspol and some of the industrial cities of Soviet Moldova declared that they felt aligned to Moscow, not to Chişinău.

These cities, located mostly on the left bank of the Dnister river, proclaimed the separatist state of “Transnistria” and never returned under the control of the constitutional government of Moldova. With the open backing of the Soviet (and then Russian) army based in Tiraspol, the Transnistrian separatists won their 1992 war with Moldova leaving more than 1,000 dead. That painful defeat is still seen as one of the reasons for Moldovan people to seek to avoid any military scenario. And the Kremlin knows that.

The Russian army based in Transnistria (official name: Operational Group of Russian Forces in Transnistria, ORGF) is still illegally stationed in and around Tiraspol despite Moldovan demands to cease military activity on its territory. Nevertheless, the ORGF is underequipped, lacks training, and poses almost no

significant military threat. Its mere presence is enough to guarantee the military impunity of Transnistria.

And here comes the dividing line between Moldovans and Ukrainians. The Moldovan approach to this Russia-controlled region is reasonably different from the one Ukraine sticks to concerning Ukrainian land under Russian occupation. The Moldovan public—contrary to their Ukrainian neighbors—has ruled out any military scenario, and this approach is supported by consensus even if the Armed Forces of Ukraine would be ready to help oust the weak Russian military presence in Moldova.

From a historical perspective, Moldova's “peaceful” approach seems natural. But many Ukrainians fail to understand it and continue discussing across media and social networks—or in direct conversations—the “possibility of military operation on Moldovan territory.” This causes anger among some in Chişinău. For Moldovan citizens, this Ukrainian position looks like an attempt to undermine their sovereignty and to drag Moldova into war against their will.

For now, this discord has not reached a dangerous level (firstly, because this approach is not supported by Ukrainian government). But it illustrates that the current friendship and respect in bilateral relations between Moldova and Ukraine is not guaranteed and can be broken over strong disagreement.

And the Transnistrian issue is not the only one where problems persist. Many old problems remain unsolved even if now they are overshadowed by the war, Moldovan support of Ukraine, and their joint aspirations to join the EU.

At some point, however, these old “strings attached” may once again become visible—especially if Russian propaganda focuses effort on them. All of this means that Kyiv and Chişinău should consider investing efforts in solving old and hidden problems without hoping they just stay hidden.

### Conclusion

In the context of the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the potential Russian threat towards Moldova, the relationship between Ukraine and Moldova has reached unprecedented heights. However, the bilateral relation is not without its complexities. Historical grievances, unresolved disputes, and differing approaches to regional security issues—particularly regarding Transnistria—pose potential future challenges. The current solidarity is underpinned by recent geopolitical shifts and mutual opposition to Russian aggression, but it is not immune to the resurfacing of old tensions. Both Kyiv and Chişinău must proactively address these latent issues to ensure their partnership remains robust and resilient. Continued dialogue and cooperation are essential to

transform this period of goodwill into a lasting friendship, capable of withstanding external pressures and internal frictions. Only by confronting and resolving

these underlying problems can Ukraine and Moldova secure a stable and prosperous future together within the European Union.

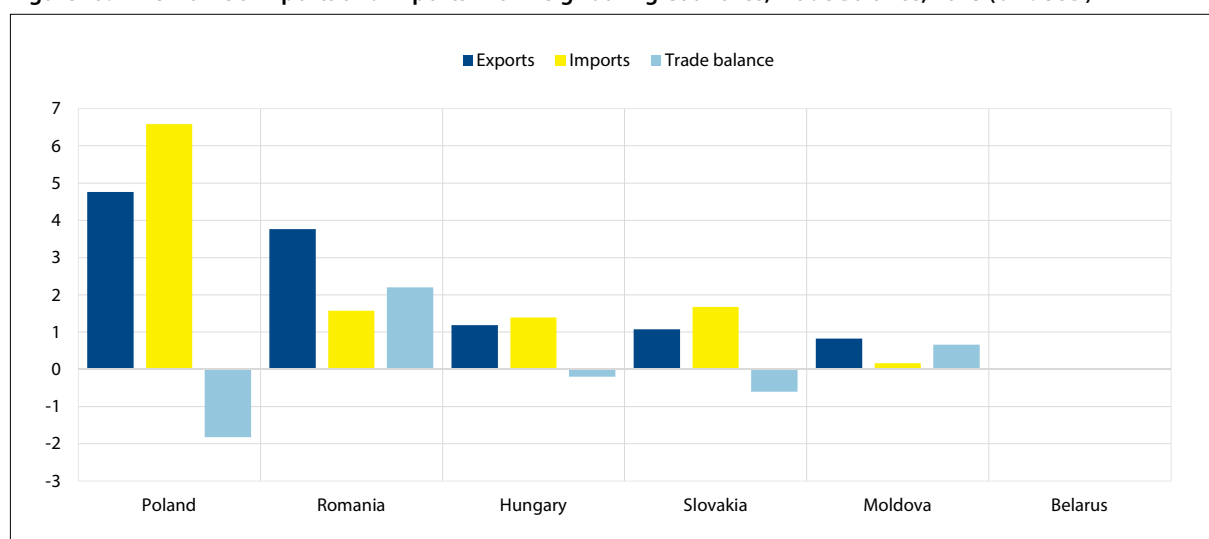
#### About the Author

*Sergiy Sydorenko* is a Ukrainian journalist and analyst, focused on European and Euro-Atlantic affairs. He is a co-founder and editor of the *European Pravda*—the key media source in Ukraine covering European issues and Ukraine's relations with Europe. Born in Moldova, Sergiy also focuses of Moldovan–Ukrainian bilateral relations.

## STATISTICS

### Ukrainian Trade with Neighboring Countries

Figure 1a: Ukraine's Imports and Exports with Neighboring Countries, Trade Balance, 2023 (bln. USD)

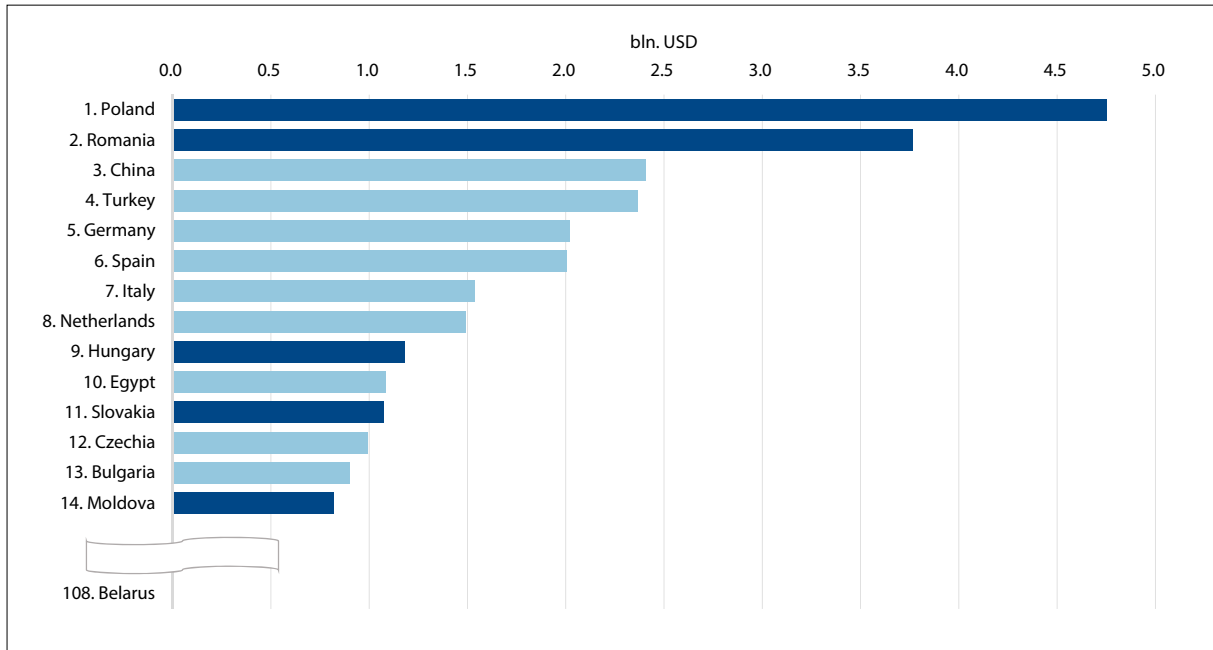


	Exports	Imports	Trade balance
Poland	4.76	6.58	-1.82
Romania	3.76	1.57	2.20
Hungary	1.18	1.39	-0.20

	Exports	Imports	Trade balance
Slovakia	1.07	1.68	-0.60
Moldova	0.82	0.16	0.66
Belarus	0.003	0.019	-0.016

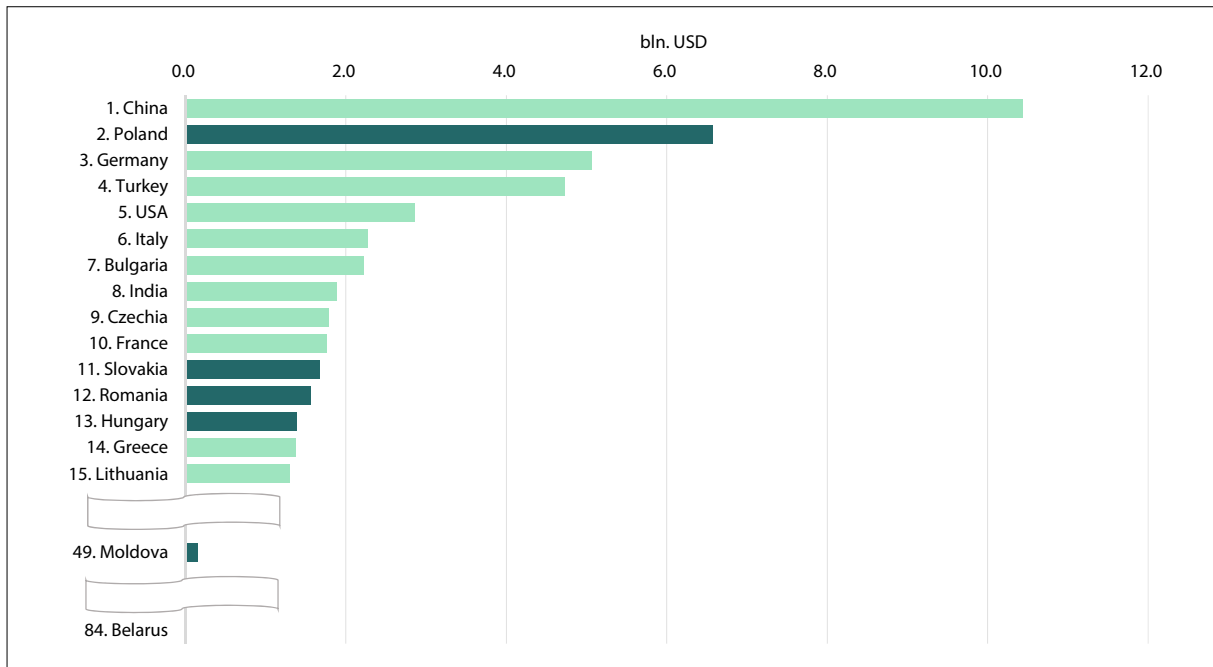
Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine, *Geographical Structure of Ukraine's Foreign Trade 2023*, [https://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2024/zd/ztt/arh\\_ztt2023.html](https://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2024/zd/ztt/arh_ztt2023.html).

**Figure 1b: Ukraine's Exports to Neighboring Countries in 2023 (Rank in Comparison)**



Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine, Geographical Structure of Ukraine's Foreign Trade 2023, [https://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2024/zd/ztt/arh\\_ztt2023.html](https://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2024/zd/ztt/arh_ztt2023.html).

**Figure 1c: Ukraine's Imports from Neighboring Countries in 2023 (Rank in Comparison)**



Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine, Geographical Structure of Ukraine's Foreign Trade 2023, [https://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2024/zd/ztt/arh\\_ztt2023.html](https://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2024/zd/ztt/arh_ztt2023.html).

Table 1: Top-5 Products by Trade Partners (2023, mln. USD)

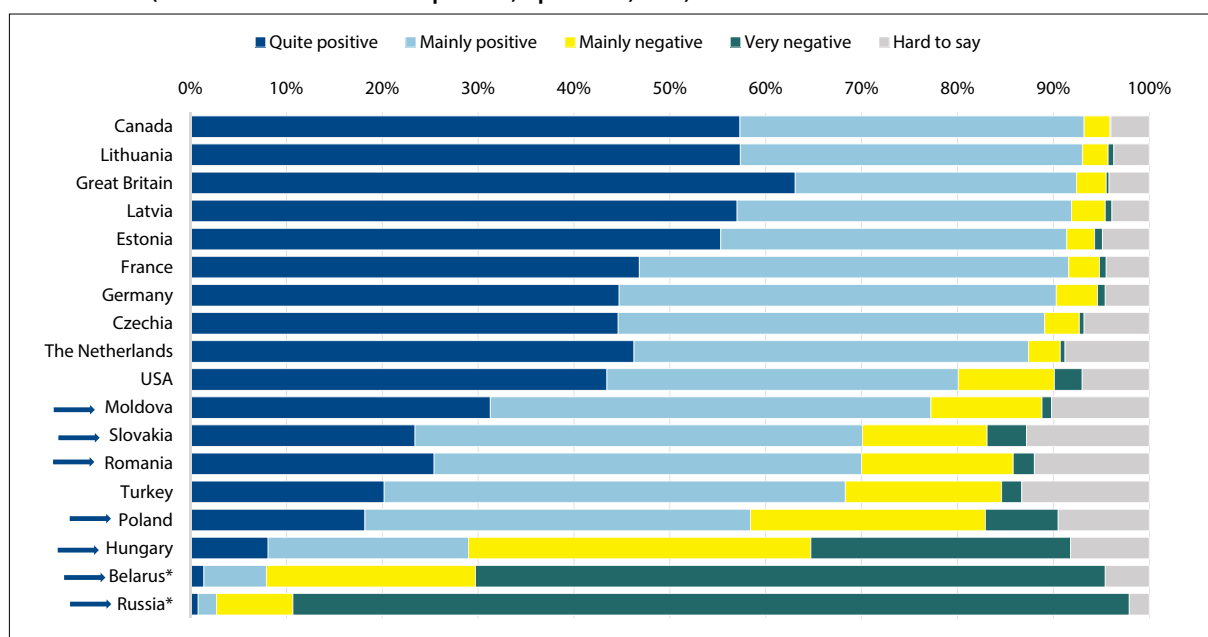
<b>Poland</b>			
<b>Exports</b>		<b>Imports</b>	
Ferrous metals	1,064	Mineral fuels; oil and products of its distillation	1,340
Fats and oils of animal or vegetable origin	616	Means of land transport, aircraft, floating vehicles	641
Remains and wastes of food industry	387	Polymeric materials, plastics and products from them	459
Ores, slags, ashes	355	Nuclear reactors, boilers, machines	399
Wood and articles of wood	283	Fertilizers	354
<b>Romania</b>			
<b>Exports</b>		<b>Imports</b>	
Grain crops	1,042	Mineral fuels; oil and products of its distillation	573
Fats and oils of animal or vegetable origin	1,000	Means of land transport, aircraft, floating vehicles	110
Oil seeds and fruits	414	Ferrous metals	62
Ores, slags, ashes	154	Electric machines	61
Ferrous metals	140	Polymeric materials, plastics and products from them	51
<b>Hungary</b>			
<b>Exports</b>		<b>Imports</b>	
Electric machines	476	Electric machines	301
Grain crops	189	Means of land transport, aircraft, floating vehicles	231
Oil seeds and fruits	87	Mineral fuels; oil and products of its distillation	199
Remains and wastes of food industry	75	Polymeric materials, plastics and products from them	127
Wood and articles of wood	69	Nuclear reactors, boilers, machines	93
<b>Slovakia</b>			
<b>Exports</b>		<b>Imports</b>	
Ores, slags, ashes	503	Mineral fuels; oil and products of its distillation	630
Meat and meat preparations	103	Means of land transport, aircraft, floating vehicles	366
Electric machines	96	Ferrous metals	149
Mineral fuels; oil and products of its distillation	70	Electric machines	74
Grain crops	59	Polymeric materials, plastics and products from them	67
<b>Moldova</b>			
<b>Exports</b>		<b>Imports</b>	
Ferrous metals	75	Alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages	34
Wood and articles of wood	66	Mineral fuels; oil and products of its distillation	23
Milk and milk products; eggs; honey	52	Pulses, nuts	13
Polymeric materials, plastics and products from them	43	Tanning extracts	12
Electric machines	39	Vegetables	9
<b>Belarus</b>			
<b>Exports</b>		<b>Imports</b>	
Ferrous metals	3	Glass and preparations thereof	14
		Means of land transport, aircraft, floating vehicles	1
		Nuclear reactors, boilers, machines	0.9
		Polymeric materials, plastics and products from them	0.9
		Paper, paperboard	0.6

Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine, Geographical Structure of Ukraine's Foreign Trade 2023, [https://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2024/zd/ztt/arh\\_ztt2023.html](https://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2024/zd/ztt/arh_ztt2023.html).

OPINION POLL

## Ukrainians' Attitude to Neighboring Countries

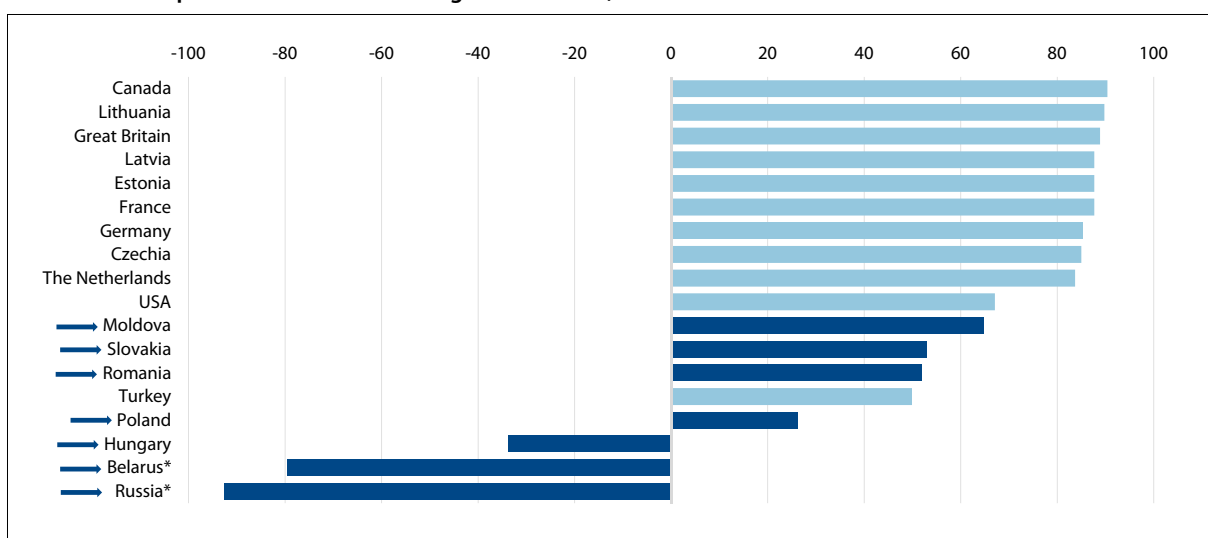
**Figure 1a: How Positive or Negative Is Your Attitude to the Following Countries? (Selected Countries in Comparison, April 2024, in %)**



\* January 2024

Source: Razumkov centre, Attitudes towards Other Countries, 18 April 2024, <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/otsinka-vplyvu-zovnishnopolitychnykh-chynnykiv-na-ukrainu-stavlennia-do-inozemnykh-derzhav-ta-okremykh-initsiatyv-ikh-lideriv-otsinka-gromadianamy-ukrainy-legitymnosti-pravlinnia-putina-berezen-2024r>.

**Figure 1b: How Positive or Negative Is Your Attitude to the Following Countries? (Selected Countries in Comparison, April 2024, in %—Difference between the Shares of Those Who Reported a Positive and a Negative Attitude)**



\* January 2024

Source: Razumkov centre, Attitudes towards Other Countries, 18 April 2024, <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/otsinka-vplyvu-zovnishnopolitychnykh-chynnykiv-na-ukrainu-stavlennia-do-inozemnykh-derzhav-ta-okremykh-initsiatyv-ikh-lideriv-otsinka-gromadianamy-ukrainy-legitymnosti-pravlinnia-putina-berezen-2024r>.

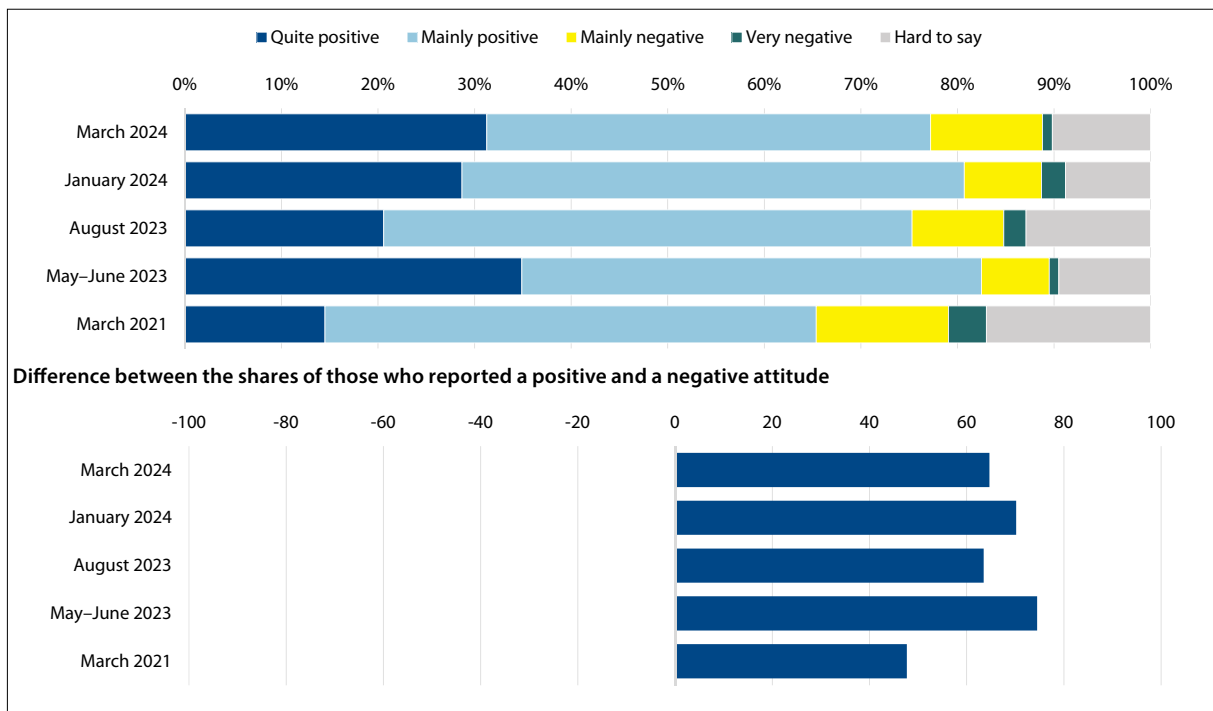
**Table 1: How Positive or Negative Is Your Attitude to the Following Countries? (Selected Countries in Comparison, April 2024, in %)**

	Quite positive	Mainly positive	Mainly negative	Quite negative	Hard to say	Difference between the shares of those who reported a positive and a negative attitude
Canada	57.3	35.9	2.7	0.1	4	90.4
Lithuania	57.4	35.7	2.7	0.6	3.7	89.8
Great Britain	63	29.3	3.1	0.3	4.2	88.9
Latvia	57	34.9	3.5	0.7	3.9	87.7
Estonia	55.3	36.1	2.9	0.8	4.9	87.7
France	46.8	44.8	3.2	0.7	4.5	87.7
Germany	44.7	45.6	4.3	0.8	4.6	85.2
Czechia	44.6	44.5	3.6	0.5	6.8	85
The Netherlands	46.3	41.2	3.3	0.5	8.8	83.7
USA	43.4	36.6	10	2.9	7	67.1
Moldova	31.3	46	11.6	1	10.2	64.7
Slovakia	23.4	46.6	13	4.1	12.8	52.9
Romania	25.4	44.6	15.8	2.2	12	52
Turkey	20.2	48.1	16.3	2.1	13.3	49.9
Poland	18.2	40.2	24.5	7.6	9.5	26.3
Hungary	8.1	20.9	35.7	27.1	8.2	-33.8
Belarus*	1.4	6.5	21.8	65.6	4.6	-79.5
Russia*	0.8	1.9	8	87.3	2.1	-92.6

\* January 2024

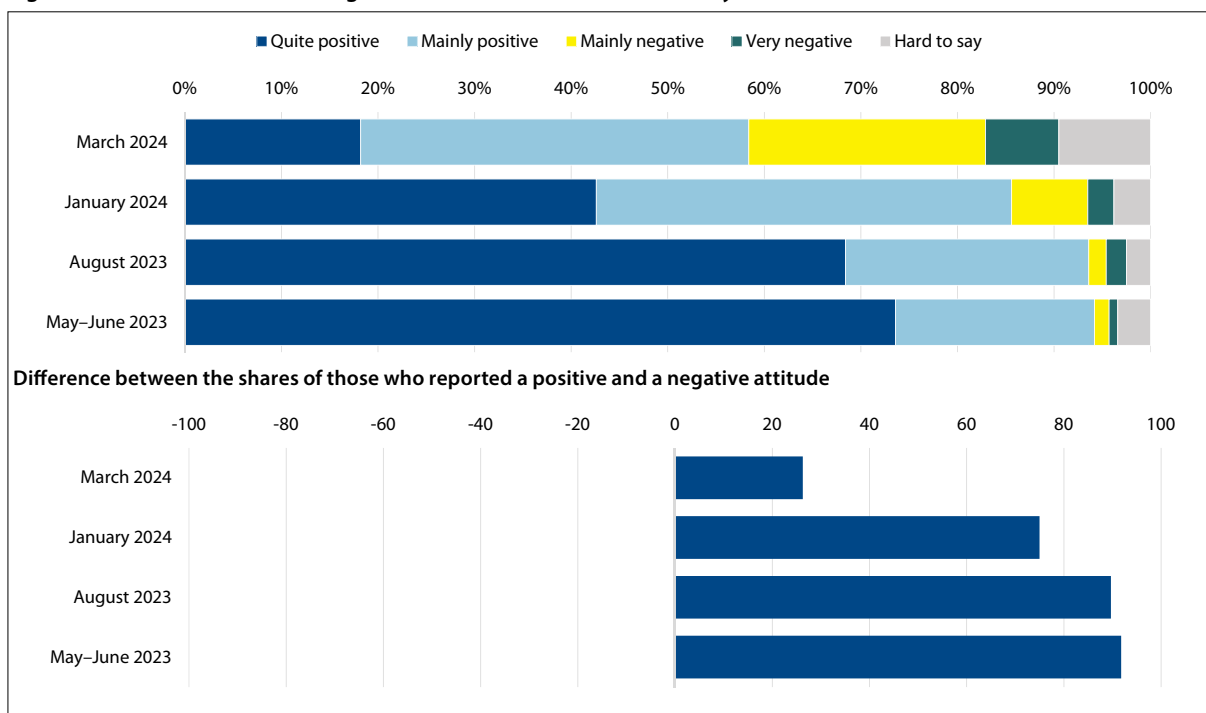
Source: Razumkov centre, Attitudes towards Other Countries, 18 April 2024, <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/otsinka-vplyvu-zovnishnopolitychnykh-chynnykiv-na-ukrainu-stavlennia-do-inozemnykh-derzhav-ta-okremykh-initsiatyv-ikh-lideriv-otsinka-gromadianamy-ukrainy-legitymnosti-pravlinnia-putina-berezen-2024r>.

**Figure 2a: How Positive or Negative Is Your Attitude to Moldova? (Dynamics 2021–2024, in %)**



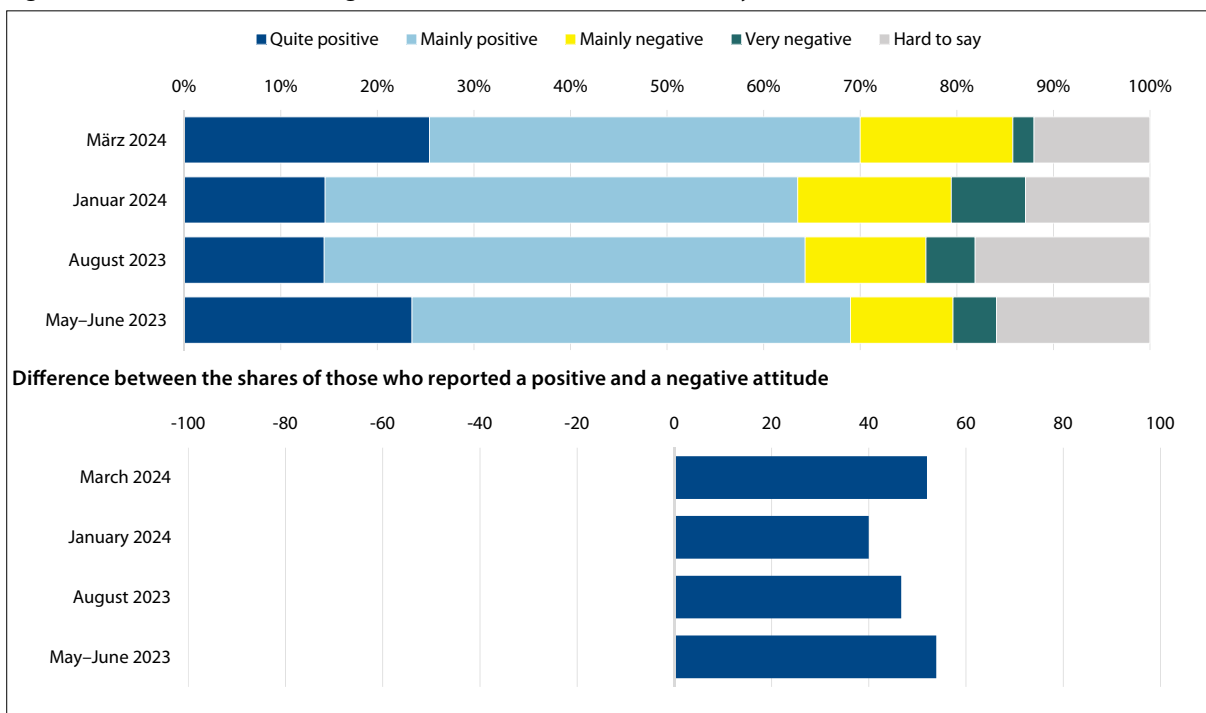
Source: Razumkov centre, Attitudes towards Other Countries, 18 April 2024, <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/otsinka-vplyvu-zovnishnopolitychnykh-chynnykiv-na-ukrainu-stavlennia-do-inozemnykh-derzhav-ta-okremykh-initsiatyv-ikh-lideriv-otsinka-gromadianamy-ukrainy-legitymnosti-pravlinnia-putina-berezen-2024r>.

**Figure 2b: How Positive or Negative Is Your Attitude to Poland? (Dynamics 2021–2024, in %)**



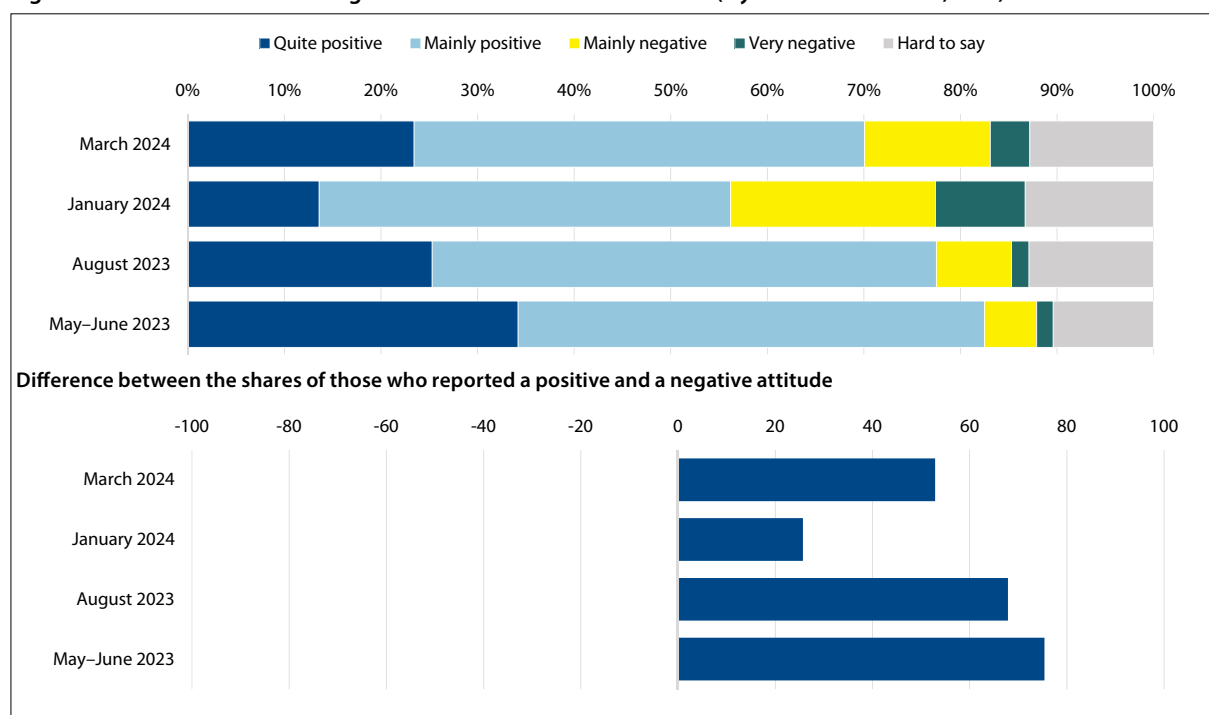
Source: Razumkov centre, *Attitudes towards Other Countries*, 18 April 2024, <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/otsinka-vplyvu-zovnishnopolitychnykh-chynnykiv-na-ukrainu-stavlennia-do-inozemnykh-derzhav-ta-okremykh-initsiatyv-ikh-lideriv-otsinka-gromadianamy-ukrainy-legitymnosti-pravlinnia-putina-berezen-2024r>.

**Figure 2c: How Positive or Negative Is Your Attitude to Romania? (Dynamics 2021–2024, in %)**



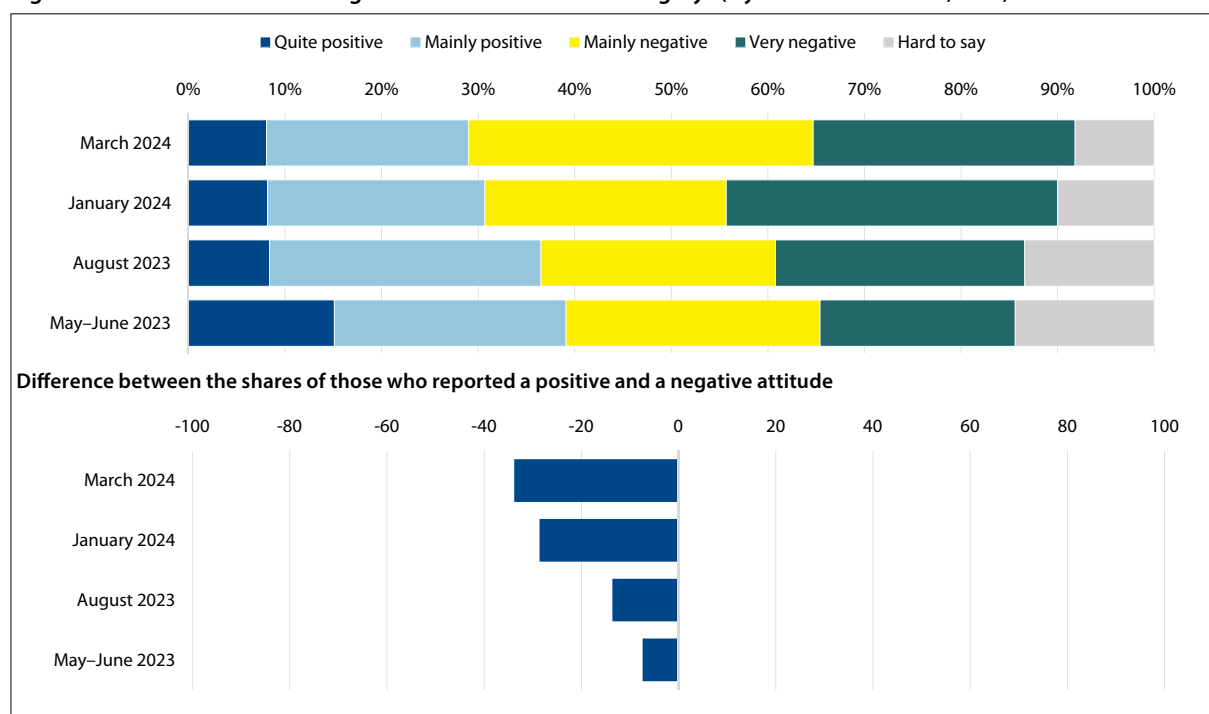
Source: Razumkov centre, *Attitudes towards Other Countries*, 18 April 2024, <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/otsinka-vplyvu-zovnishnopolitychnykh-chynnykiv-na-ukrainu-stavlennia-do-inozemnykh-derzhav-ta-okremykh-initsiatyv-ikh-lideriv-otsinka-gromadianamy-ukrainy-legitymnosti-pravlinnia-putina-berezen-2024r>.

**Figure 2d: How Positive or Negative Is Your Attitude to Slovakia? (Dynamics 2021–2024, in %)**



Source: Razumkov centre, *Attitudes towards Other Countries*, 18 April 2024, <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/otsinka-vplyvu-zovnishnopolitychnykh-chynnykiv-na-ukrainu-stavlennia-do-inozemnykh-derzhav-ta-okremykh-initsiatyv-ikh-lideriv-otsinka-gromadianamy-ukrainy-legitymnosti-pravlinnia-putina-berezen-2024r>.

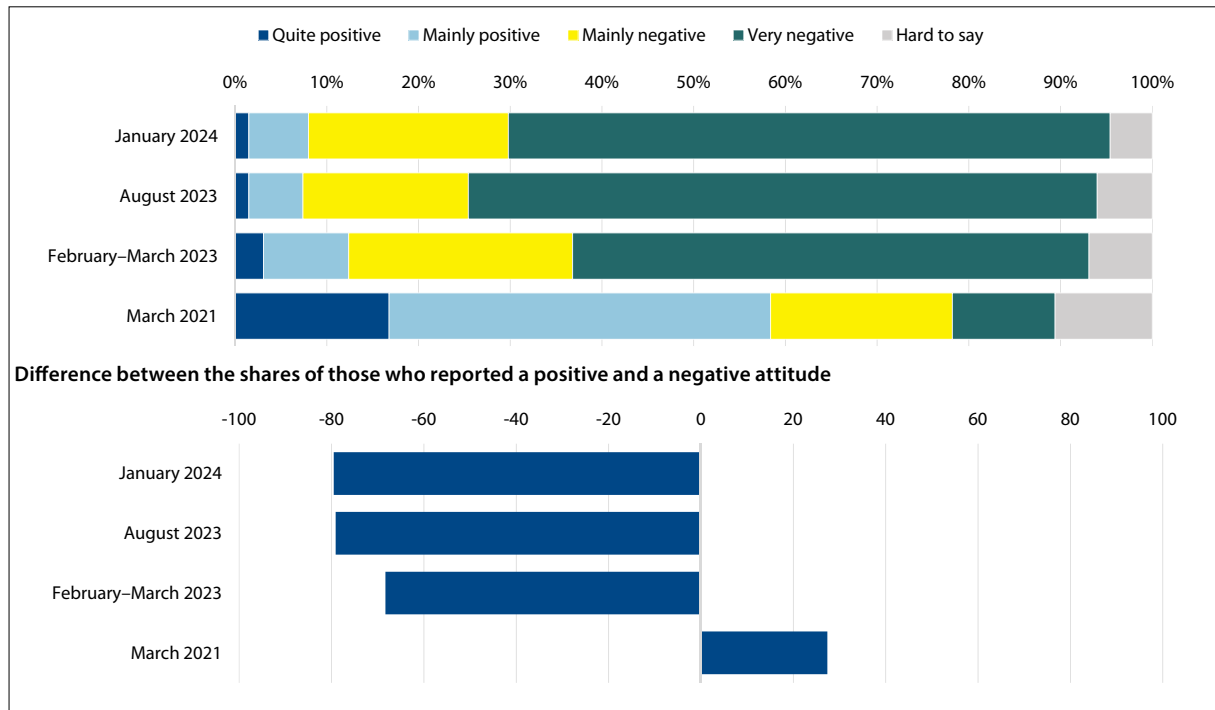
**Figure 2e: How Positive or Negative Is Your Attitude to Hungary? (Dynamics 2021–2024, in %)**



Source: Razumkov centre, *Attitudes towards Other Countries*, 18 April 2024, <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/otsinka-vplyvu-zovnishnopolitychnykh-chynnykiv-na-ukrainu-stavlennia-do-inozemnykh-derzhav-ta-okremykh-initsiatyv-ikh-lideriv-otsinka-gromadianamy-ukrainy-legitymnosti-pravlinnia-putina-berezen-2024r>.



**Figure 2f: How Positive or Negative Is Your Attitude to Belarus? (Dynamics 2021–2024, in %)**



Source: Razumkov centre, *Attitudes towards Other Countries*, 18 April 2024, <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/otsinka-vplyvu-zovnishnopolitychnykh-chynnnykiv-na-ukrainu-stavlennia-do-inozemnykh-derzhav-ta-okremykh-initsiatyv-ikh-lideriv-otsinka-gromadianamy-ukrainy-legitymnosti-pravlinnia-putina-berezen-2024r>.

**Table 2: How Positive or Negative Is Your Attitude to the Following Countries? (Dynamics 2021–2024, in %)**

	Quite positive	Mainly positive	Mainly negative	Quite negative	Hard to say	Difference between the shares of those who reported a positive and a negative attitude
<b>Moldova</b>						
March 2024	31.3	46	11.6	1	10.2	64.7
January 2024	28.7	52	8	2.5	8.8	70.2
August 2023	20.6	54.7	9.5	2.3	12.9	63.5
May–June 2023	34.9	47.6	7	1	9.5	74.5
March 2021	14.5	50.8	13.7	3.9	17	47.7
<b>Poland</b>						
March 2024	18.2	40.2	24.5	7.6	9.5	26.3
January 2024	42.6	43	7.9	2.7	3.8	75
August 2023	68.4	25.2	1.8	2.1	2.5	89.7
May–June 2023	73.6	20.6	1.5	0.9	3.4	91.8

Continued overleaf

**Table 2: How Positive or Negative Is Your Attitude to the Following Countries? (Dynamics 2021–2024, in %) (Continued)**

	Quite positive	Mainly positive	Mainly negative	Quite negative	Hard to say	Difference between the shares of those who reported a positive and a negative attitude
<b>Romania</b>						
March 2024	25.4	44.6	15.8	2.2	12	52
January 2024	14.6	49	15.9	7.7	12.9	40
August 2023	14.5	49.8	12.5	5.1	18.1	46.7
May–June 2023	23.6	45.4	10.6	4.5	15.9	53.9
<b>Slovakia</b>						
March 2024	23.4	46.6	13	4.1	12.8	52.9
January 2024	13.6	42.6	21.2	9.3	13.3	25.7
August 2023	25.3	52.2	7.8	1.8	12.9	67.9
May–June 2023	34.2	48.3	5.4	1.7	10.4	75.4
<b>Hungary</b>						
March 2024	8.1	20.9	35.7	27.1	8.2	–33.8
January 2024	8.2	22.5	25	34.3	10	–28.6
August 2023	8.4	28.1	24.3	25.8	13.4	–13.6
May–June 2023	15.1	24	26.3	20.2	14.4	–7.4
<b>Belarus</b>						
January 2024	1.5	6.5	21.8	65.6	4.6	–79.5
August 2023	1.5	5.9	18	68.6	6	–79.1
February–March 2023	3.1	9.3	24.4	56.3	6.9	–68.3
March 2021	16.8	41.6	19.8	11.2	10.6	27.4

Source: Razumkov centre, *Attitudes towards Other Countries*, 18 April 2024, <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/otsinka-vplyvu-zovnishnopolitychnykh-chynnykiv-na-ukrainu-stavlennia-do-inozemnykh-derzhav-ta-okremykh-initsiatyv-ikh-lideriv-otsinka-gromadianamy-ukrainy-legitymnosti-pravlinnia-putina-berezen-2024r>.

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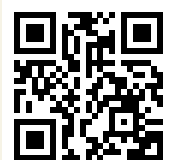
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