Europeanization of Poland’s Strategic Culture: 
Managing the 2013/14 Ukraine Crisis

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Abstract: The 2013/14 Ukraine crisis showed that the Eastern Neighborhood – and more so Russia – are still highly divisive issues among EU states, which prevented a quick and decisive response by the EU. This paper traces these differences in foreign policy attitudes to national strategic cultures, historically shaped beliefs, attitudes, and practices regarding international behavior, which provide guidelines for action during conflicts. The ambition of member states to Europeanize their strategic cultures and the simultaneous dominance of national strategic cultures, account for an overall ineffective and ambiguous European response to the crisis. Looking at Poland as one of the more proactive countries in Ukraine, this paper argues that although Poland recognized crucial trends earlier than others, its actions were nonetheless weakened by the ambition to compromise with other EU members, particularly with Germany. When the crisis escalated and Russia became a more visible player, it was not Poland, but Germany and France, which emerged as dominant actors on the European side. This indicates that the Europeanization of national strategic is a process of adaptation to a center of gravity with the EU.

Nothing illuminates the main feature of – and fissures within – international society more [than war.] War comes as a bolt of lightening on a dark night, lighting up the geostrategic topology of global politics, and illuminating the patterns of power and influences amongst major actors, their formal and informal alliances and their varying cultural assumptions about strategic theory and practice. (Hyde-Price 2005:137)

The Ukraine crisis of 2013/14 is without doubt one of the most important events in the history of EU external relations. This is not only due to the geographical proximity of

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1 This paper is a preliminary draft. The case study is based on interviews conducted in August 2014 in Kiev, Ukraine.

the armed conflict, and Russia’s role in it, but also due to the Maidan’s appeal to European values, and the EU’s direct relevance during the events preceding the crisis.

The massive anti-government protests in Kiev, which become known as the Maidan, began when Ukrainian president, Viktor Yanukovych, announced his withdraw from negotiations of an Association Agreement (AA) with the EU, which was supposed to be signed at the Vilnius Summit, in November 2014. The escalation of the protests, which lead to the fall of the pro-Russian Yanukovych regime, was followed by Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea in early March 2014, and a proxy war in east Ukraine.

Despite deaths of protesters on the Maidan, who called for democracy and closer association with the EU, in early 2014 the EU’s response to the events was rather slow and reactive. European support for the Maidan did not go much beyond rhetorical ‘condemnation’ of Yanukovych’s actions. Only after Russia’s annexation of Crimea and a Russian-backed separatist war in east Ukraine, did EU and NATO countries become more proactive, and imposed sanctions on Russia. These were, however, of limited extent until of the Malaysian Airlines flight MH17, which carried on board mainly EU and Australian citizens, was shot down by ‘separatists’ in east Ukraine.

From the beginning, the EU made attempts to respond to the crisis as a unitary and determined actor. However, differences in opinion about how to respond to the Maidan and how to appropriately deal with Russia soon became apparent among member states.

The Ukraine crisis showed that the Eastern Neighborhood, and more so Russia, are still highly divisive issues among EU states, which prevented a quick and decisive response by the EU. This paper traces these differences in foreign policy attitudes to the strategic cultures of member states. Strategic culture is defined as a country’s historically shaped body of beliefs, attitudes, and practices regarding international behavior, which provides guidelines for action during conflicts (Longhurst and Zaborowski 2005, Meyer 2006). The ambition of member states to Europeanize their strategic cultures and the simultaneously prevalent dominance of national strategic cultures, account for an overall ineffective and ambiguous European response to the crisis. To demonstrate this, this paper looks at Poland, one of the more proactive countries in Ukraine. It argues that although Poland recognized crucial trends earlier than others, its actions were nonetheless
weakened by the ambition to compromise with other EU members, particularly with Germany.

Furthermore, when crisis escalated and Russia became a more visible player, it was not Poland, but Germany and France, which emerged as the dominant actors on the European side. This raises the question what ‘Europeanization’ of strategic cultures actually means in practice. The findings of this paper suggest that rather than the ‘Europeanization of equals,’ it is a process of adaptation to a clear center of gravity with the EU.

1. Strategic culture in IR

In line with a constructivist approach, this paper assumes that foreign policies of states are guided not only by material interests but are also shaped by socially constructed values and norms. To conceptualize the role of values and norms in a state’s response to crises this paper will use strategic culture existing as an analytical framework (Longhurst and Zaborowski 2005, Meyer 2006, Giegerich 2006, Howorth 2007). However, my definition of the concept extends beyond its traditional use in literature, as a set of norms regarding the use of force, to a set of norms on international behavior more generally. The reason for this extension is that conflicts in the current international system cannot be reduced to conventional warfare. Other forms of conflict, such as cyber wars, or economic sanctions like those imposed by the West on Russia response to the Ukraine crisis are often intended to serve as an alternative to traditional military conflict. Thus, the traditional definition of strategic culture as ‘attitudes to the use of force’ is too narrow for the analysis of many current conflicts.

After briefly defining strategic culture, as it is used in literature I will apply this term to the study of EU and member states’ foreign policies.

Jack Snyder, who coined the term strategic culture in 1977 in his study of Soviet nuclear strategy, defines it as “the sum total of ideals, conditional emotional responses and patterns of habitual behavior that members of the national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other in regards to strategy”
Colin S. Gray takes the concept beyond observation of behavior to the level of principle defining it as a state’s “modes of thought and action with respect to force” which indicate (but do not determine) an actor’s behavior in regards to the use of force (Gray 1999, in Giegerich 40).

Macmillan, Booth and Trood add the importance of temporal continuity to the definition. The authors define strategic culture “a distinctive and lasting set of beliefs, values and habits regarding the threat and use of force, which have their roots in such fundamental influences as geographical settings, history and political culture” (Macmillan, Booth and Trood 1999). This paper agrees with the above definition but extends it beyond attitudes to the use of force to boarder attitudes regarding international behavior including preferences of alliances, strategic spheres of belonging and views about how that international system functions.

Constructivists often link strategic culture to national identity (Holsti 1970, Howorth 2007, Hudson 1997, Meyer 2006). Emphasizing collective experiences and discourses that shape the self-understanding of a national society, the various definitions proposed by this group of IR scholars entail references to “beliefs, ideas, attitudes, world views, collective memories, as well as practices, habits, traditions, or patterns of behavior,” which shape a nation’s international behavior (Meyer 2006, 19). Jolyon Howorth emphasizes the role of “cultural narratives of national situation, rank and security.” He argues that “internal cultural cohesion; interaction with neighbors; defeat and occupation; threat perceptions, past material and imperial ambitions and traditions” are some of the elements that shape these narratives (Howorth 2007: 178).

Because strategic culture engages with issues of collective identity, scholars have traditionally attributed strategic cultures to nation states as units of collective identity. This is somewhat problematic because national cultures are not homogenous. Different factions within a state’s society represent different political views and cultural values and thus diverging views on strategic and foreign policy norms. Also as Christoph O. Meyer points out, “governments are often motivated by more than one reason, and norms can clash on different levels” (Meyer 2006, 19). Strategic culture must therefore be taken loosely, referring to general tendencies in foreign policy decision-making. According to Meyer, “strategic culture can be described as a compass that helps countries chart their
long-term path in security and defense policy, but also helps them make choices at various junctures of uncertainty” (Meyer 2006, 2). Strategic culture is thus understood as a set of beliefs and attitudes that is continuous over longer periods of time but at the same time it is subject to change in response to the international environment of the present. As K. Longhurst puts it: “A strategic culture is present over time, tending to outlast the era of its inception, although it is not a permanent or static feature. It is shaped and influenced by formative periods and can alter, either fundamentally or piecemeal at critical junctures in that collective’s experience” (Longhurst 2004). Although it has the potential to undergo change and transformation, strategic culture is also resistant to change because it represents norms and beliefs deeply embedded in a national culture. As Giegerich emphasizes, strategic culture is only “open to gradual change through policy-making elites, particularly in times of perceived crisis” (Giegerich 2006, 40). International crises are often catalysts of new elements that are integrated into an existing strategic culture because they shake up and put into question some of the deeply rooted convictions of policy-makers and societies.

Literature on European integration has taken strategic culture beyond the nation-state level and attributed it to groups of states provided that they share common values and a common identity that shape common norms and expectations about foreign policy behavior (Meyer 2006, Giegerich 2006, Longhurst and Zaborowski 2005). This paper agrees with the idea that we can speak of a strategic culture of institutions like NATO and the EU because over time these institutions, and their member states, as a result of cooperation and intensive interaction with each other, have developed distinct identities and sets of values – even if they are less firm than national identities and norms. Institutional and national strategic cultures are not mutually exclusive, and can be overlapping.

Authors who study European strategic culture focus on the differences between the strategic cultures of various member states that prevent or slow down coherent foreign policy responses of the EU (Meyer 2006, Giegerich 2006). An often-made argument is that “different European attitudes towards the use of force are rooted in twentieth century history, particularly the experience of World War II and the Cold War. Each European country experienced the war differently, and thus drew different
conclusions from it” (Hyde-Price, 2004, 139). Although such differences are more complex and differentiated than presented here, they play a role when, for example, studying attitudes of EU member states to important strategic players, like the U.S. or Russia.

**Divisions among European countries**

In a 2003 report High Representative Javier Solana stated that the EU must develop “a strategic culture that foresters early rapid, and when necessary, robust intervention” during international crises (Solana 2003). The EU has implemented a number of instruments, such as the European Security Strategy (ESS), the External Action Service that would provide frameworks for a common EU foreign policy. The implementation of frameworks by which member states are encouraged to cooperate with others during important foreign policy decisions, and the existence of guidelines like the ESS could over time ‘Europeanize’ national strategic cultures.

Nevertheless, some subjects remained highly divisive among EU states based on fundamental differences in attitudes that are deeply embedded in national strategic cultures. In particular during times of crises such divisions become visible. One of these divisive subjects is the relationship with Russia, and consequently the Eastern Neighborhood, countries that geographically and politically lie in between Russia and the EU. Eastern neighborhood countries, such as Georgia and Ukraine have in the last decade constituted a point of contention between the West and Russia. Whereas both these countries have expressed a will to move closer to the West, and potentially join Western international initiations, Russia continues to perceived them as part its ‘sphere of influence’.

Henrik Boesen Lindbo Larsen describes four main reaction profiles towards Russia among European states based on the 2008 Georgia War. Larsen argues that the split is best explained by each state’s “basic assumptions about the strategic environment in which the state is positioned […] developed form historic experiences that is expected to influence the foreign policy behavior in concrete cases” (Larsen 7). On the one end of the spectrum he places Germany and France who for different reasons are most interested
in the preservation of friendly relations with Russia. Both actors advocate the ‘socialization’ of Russia though ‘creeping integration.’ France is traditionally interested in strengthening its own international position through a balance of power in Europe, and use its partnership with Russia to oppose American hegemony (Leonard and Popescu, 2007, 31). Germany’s strategic culture favors strong economic ties with Russia. Germany also tends to prefer incorporation and dialogue as methods of appeasement. At the opposite of the spectrum Larsen places the ‘traditional’ hawks, the United Kingdom and Poland, which still have the tendency to consider Russia a potential adversary.

Poland’s attitude to Russia is a result of both historical experience and contemporary threat perceptions. For more than a hundred years, “Poland’s basic security dilemma has been the country’s place on the map between two powerful states: Germany and Russia” (Micha 75). With its history of frequent invasion by foreign powers and its sovereignty many times lost, Poland has been distrustful of its most powerful neighbors. While the incorporation into Western institutions lessened the perception of a German threat, Russia has remained a crucial player in Poland’s security perception. This is influenced not only by Poland’s more recent history of occupation by the Soviet Union but is also re-enforced by Russia’s attempts to recreate its former sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, which is viewed in Poland with great alarm.

2. Case Study: Poland’s Strategic Culture and the Ukraine Crisis

The historical significance of Poland’s Eastern neighborhood is deeply embedded in the country’s strategic culture and continues to inform its present foreign policy preferences. The historically grounded roots of Poland’s contemporary eastern policy are its cultural attachment to the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and wariness of Russian power.

Since Poland first regained independence in the inter-war period, it focused on stabilizing the East. Its leader Józef Piłsudski supported national self-determination in Eastern Europe and “aimed to recreate the partitioned commonwealth as a loose confederation led by Poland but with a large degree of autonomy for the other East
European states. To this end, he supported the Ukrainian independence movement and militarily endorsed the anti-Russian Ukrainian uprising” (Longhurst and Zaborowski 8). The aim of this foreign policy project was to weaken the Russian Empire (or its successor state the Soviet Union) by supporting national independence movements among the different peoples, such as Ukrainians, Georgians, or Armenians, within the borders of the Soviet Union. The goal was to liberate, the peoples of the Baltic, Black and Caspian Sea basins from Russian imperialist aspirations. The creation of a series of independent states was simultaneously to serve as a common defensive front against Russian aggression, and a buffer zone for Poland (Kowal 2010). A simultaneous focus on stabilizing its eastern environment and building alliances with Western powers has been regarded the principle for securing Poland’s independence. This principle has prevailed to shape Poland’s contemporary grand strategy.

The same principle guided Polish foreign policy after 1989. Warsaw recognized the independence of its eastern neighbors and confirmed its common borders with them immediately after the end of the Cold War. Also, “as early as 1998, before its own membership was confirmed, Poland called for an Eastern dimension of the EU” (Longhurst and Zaborowski, 59-60). Poland’s eastern foreign policy has been aimed at integrating its eastern neighbor countries into the West, in particular Ukraine, and initially Belarus. Although it became clear early on that the latter would be less successful. “Among the countries of Central Europe, Poland has attached a special importance to relations with its Eastern neighbors since the 1990s.” (Shpovalova and Kapusniaki 2011,1). This was the case even though Poland’s foreign policy was primarily focused on integration into NATO and the EU in that decade.

Once Poland achieved both NATO and EU membership, it was advocating eastern expansion of both international entities. Along with Sweden and Germany, Poland is the most active in promoting the EU’s Eastern Partnership. Poland has been pursuing a “twin foreign policy traditions of rooting [itself] in the West and spreading Western influences further into the East, arguing against the understanding of Europe as a ‘lifeboat to which one tries to prevent others from getting on board’ and constructing the identity of Poland as a bridge to the East” (Malksoo 2010, 79).
This aim transcends party-differences and has been actively pursued by governments under the post-communist Left as well as under the post-solidarity Right. President Aleksander Kwaśniewski pointed out in a speech: “The future of the Union even more than before should promote democratic and economic changes in the states outside its institutions […] We must not forget that the areas of the so-called near abroad […] are also the Black Sea and Eastern Europe” (Kwaśniewski in Malksoo 2010, 79). In a similar spirit, President Lech Kaczynski noted in reference to the Eastern neighborhood: “I lead a policy of great leniency towards our weaker partners, not yielding to the pressures of the stronger” (Kaczynski).²

Poland thus has sought to play an important role as a regional leader by acting as a “bridge between the West and the former Soviet republics and by attempting to energize the EU’s policies towards Ukraine in particular” (Longhurst and Zaborowski 90). This foreign policy is based on an underlining assumption that goes back to the interwar period: strengthening democracy and independence from Russia in its eastern neighborhood is crucial for Poland’s own security from its former occupier.

According to Mykola Kniazhycki, member of the Ukrainian Parliament, Poland acted as an advocate of Ukraine in the EU, independent of who was in government during the last decade. This can be explained through its proximity in geography, language, a common history, especially the fact that people have historically migrated between the two countries, and through a common fear of Russian power (Kniazhicki, interview from August 10, Kiev). Poland has been playing the role of a ‘mediator’ between the West and the former Soviet world.

During its membership in the EU, Poland has been increasingly exercising its strategic culture within a EU framework. The Eastern Partnership (EaP), which was proposed jointly by Poland and Sweden, is an expression of this. This Europeanization of Poland’s strategic culture simultaneously serves the legitimization of Poland’s presence in the ‘community of Western states’ and a response to voices of critique with the EU

that Poland has anachronistic views about Russia and the international system (Malksoo 2010). Also, it entailed the pursuit of its traditional goals though incremental rather than radical measures. Although many Polish politicians remained in favor the eventual membership of Ukraine and Georgia in the EU, they work towards this goal indirectly through the EaP and promotion of association agreements. This allows greater support from other member states that are more skeptical of the idea of membership for these countries.

*Poland’s response to the 2013/14 events*

Poland was a strong supporter during the preparations for the AA for Ukraine. Polish leaders, in particular President Komorowski, frequently met with Yanukovych pushing the Ukrainian president to conduct necessary reforms to fulfill the conditions of the AA. When this proved rather unsuccessful, Poland went so far as to negotiate within the EU that Ukraine would be absolved of some conditions – something that in retrospect appears quite controversial. Through the EaP, and the promotion of associating agreements Poland was able to use a European framework for the pursuit of its strategic culture of securing the neighborhood, and keeping Russia at a distance. It thus raised great concerns when Yanukovych started withdrawing, for example, by cancelling meetings with President Komorowski in the early fall of 2013 (Polish Embassy official, interview from August, 11, 2014).

Among EU countries, Poland’s active role in Ukraine stood out during the Maidan protests. Poland’s politicians but also journalists and activists were among the most visible in Kiev. In international media Poland, especially foreign minister Sikorski received a lot of attention. “Sikorski’s role was important not only for Ukraine, but his own country, which is emerging as an increasingly powerful player in European affairs” the Global Post reported (Global Post March 6, 2014). The same article cited Ryszarda Formuszewicz of the Polish Institute of International Affair, who argued that his role “could not only strengthen the image of Poland as actively involved in the EU’s eastern policy but also contribute to Poland taking a more active role in foreign policy in general” (Formuszewicz in Global Post March 6, 2014). Apart from the Unites States and
Canada, Poland played the most important role during the events, said many of the interviewed in Kiev. According to Ostap Kryvdyk, advisor to Andriy Parubiy, former Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, “Sikorski was very important...He helped to shake up the EU’s position, which had been very bureaucratic” (interview, Kiev August 12, 2014).

While Poland’s government leaders nonetheless continued talking to Yanukovych, support for the Maidan was much more univocal among Polish journalists who covered the events and among leaders of the opposition party. Jarosław Kaczyński in a heated speech in Kiev on December 1, 2014, stated that that when looking at the crowds of the demonstration, he is convinced that the Maidan will be victorious. “I am sure that Ukraine will be in the European Union, that you have already entered this path, because you are united and you are strong” (Kaczynski cited in, WP.pl, December, 1, 2013).

Poland’s public figures across the party spectrum appeared in Ukraine as true representatives of European values. According to Kryvdyk, since the Maidan, Poland, and the Eastern part of the EU in general proved to be “more guided by values” than the West of Europe, which is “guided by interests,” such as its economic relations with Russia. One of reason for this difference is the “experience Soviet totalitarianism”. Counties in the East of the EU “understand what Ukraine will face if Russia invades it. [...] It’s for ‘new’ Europe to tell ‘old’ Europe to wake up.” (Kryvdyk, interview from August 12, 2014).

From these statements by analysis, observers and the media, it can be derived that during the crisis in Ukraine Poland was able to ‘upload’ its interests and values onto the European agenda. During the Maidan, Warsaw increased its visibility while at the same time acting in with the EU framework compromising with Brussels and other EU members. This indicates Poland’s strategic culture has indeed undergone ‘Europeanization.’

Nevertheless, apart from visibility and rhetoric, Warsaw’s actions were not that different from other EU members. The overall performance of the West was met with disappointment in Ukraine. During the Maidan “the role of the EU was cynical,” said the Ukrainian journalist Jevgenij Bilonozhko (interview from 13 August, Kiev). Until the
last day of Yanukovych’s government, Poland and other EU countries continued to work with the Ukrainian president. Sikorski himself encouraged a deal between the opposition and Yanukovych. “If you don't support this [deal] you'll have martial law, the army. You will all be dead,” he told the protesters in regards to an agreement with Yanukovych to hold elections in December (Sikorski, Global Post March 6, 2014). The ambiguous behavior of the EU, which on the one hand declared support for the Maidan, and on the other hand continued to talk to Yanukovych, even after brutal killings of protesters, weakened the EU’s image as a representative of the values for which the Maidan had been fighting.

As a European delegate in Kiev stated, until the very end the West did not “recognize the trend.” From the actions of EU leaders it becomes apparent that on one hand counted on the fact that the Yanukovych regime would come to such rapid ending (interview from August 12, 2014). The result of this is a general lack of understanding among the Ukrainian population why no one in the EU has put more pressure on Yanukovych. The EU “only began to wake up when it recognized the threat from Russia” (Bilonozhko).

Russia’s annexation of Crimea, which directly followed the government change in Kiev, made evident what had been long foreseeable, that the Ukraine crisis was not merely a domestic affair but that Russia was directly involved and had its interests in Ukraine. As the crisis officially became an international conflict, the EU’s role in it began to decline. In its place NATO and the United States, as well as individual European states, particularly Germany and France became much more strongly involved. Comments of interviewees in Kiev show that whereas the EU is perceived as an economic superpower, when it comes to the protection of Ukraine from Russia, the tendency is to count on the United States and NATO. “The EU has 28 brains in one head. Its policy of compromise makes its weak” in response to a crisis. It is particularly vulnerable when dealing with Russia because Moscow has a “strategy of playing individual countries” (Kryvdyk).

In response to the annexation of Crimea, European countries and the U.S. imposed sanctions. They were, however, only of limited scope, such as the freezing of
assets and placement of travel restrictions on Russian officials. Only as the crisis continued and the West’s initial sanctions proved to have no effect on Russia, Western states gradually imposed additional sets of sanctions. More serious sanctions were introduced after the shooting down of MH-17, in mid-July. Nevertheless, conversation with Russia continued, and the West seemed to still hope for a turnaround on the part of Russia.

Among EU countries, Germany and France were managing conversation with both the international trilateral Contact Group, which comprises envoys from Kiev, Russia and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and with Russia. In general, these two member states took over the role of Brussels in conversations with Russia to manage the crisis in east Ukraine. In the Berlin declaration of July 2, 2014, negotiations took place between Russia, Germany, France and Ukraine. The foreign ministers of the four county in this joint statement urged the Contact Group to work “unconditional and mutually agreed sustainable cease-fire […] monitored by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine in conformity with its mandate […] and use their influence on the concerned parties with a view to achieving this goal” (MFA official site). In general, the four-way conversation was based on diplomacy and attempts to include Russia as a partner. The wording of the declaration does not in any way indicate Russia’s role in instigating the fighting in east Ukraine.

The EU itself was not directly involved in these negotiations, and neither were other ‘smaller’ member states. Poland, which had been so visible during the Maidan, has become practically irrelevant in the political decisions during the latest phase of the crisis.

The progression of the crisis also reveals increasing gaps between crucial actors of the ‘West’. On the one hand, gaps have become visible among member states within the EU, between countries, like Germany and France who are willing to continue negotiations with Russia, and those like Poland, which are more and more openly condemning its actions. On the other hand, a gap seems to be growing between European countries and NATO. On August 17, as the foreign ministers of Germany, France, Russian and Ukraine met in Berlin for another round of talks, NATO top military commander Philip Breedlove, spoke out in German media. In reference to the proxy war
in east Ukraine and the role of Russia’s so-called ‘little green men,’ he said: “If foreign forces seep into NATO territory, and if we can demonstrate that this approach is an aggression - then this means Article V… this means a military response to the actions of the aggressor” (EUobserver). Statements like these indicate greater willingness on the part of NATO speak openly about ‘war’ in east Ukraine and Russia’s involvement in it.

Among all these divisions it becomes less and less clear where Poland’s foreign policy falls into. While Poland de facto seems to have been left out from the decision-making process, this it might actually be its advantage. The fact that it is not involved with the Contact Group, and does not affirm what the group is doing, a EU official in Kiev said, increases its positive imagine in Ukraine. This way it continues to be perceived as Ukraine’s greatest supporter, and is becoming increasingly visible. In the meantime, those who protested on the Maidan are becoming very critical of the EU, which still “does want to recognize that there is a war” (interview from August, 13, 2014).

**Conclusion: Power relations and constellations**

This case study has exemplified that during international crises, where highly divisive issues, like the relations with Russia come to play, differences between EU member states crystallize. These differences have their roots in national strategic cultures of member states, which guide foreign policy behavior. Concerning attitudes to Russia, Germany and France, are traditionally more open to cooperation and dialogue with Russia, and discourage the rest of the EU from too strong measures to punish Russia. On the other hand, traditional ‘hawks’, such as Poland and to a lesser extent the UK, are more skeptical towards Russia and more ready to see it as a potential adversary. Although member states have to a certain extent Europeanized their national strategic cultures and try to act more in compromise with other member states, differences still exists. These fissures and fractions in foreign policy attitudes become particularly apparent during international crises. Thus, in its struggle to compromise the different attitudes, the EU as a whole can appear indecisive. During crises, like in Ukraine, EU foreign policy easily becomes ambiguous and reactive.
Looking at the example of Poland, evidence shows that the country has to a certain degree Europeanized its national strategic culture. Although in Ukraine Poland pursued its traditional goals of stabilizing the eastern neighborhood and trying to minimize Russian influence, which are embedded in its national strategic culture, it did so through a EU framework. During the Maidan, Poland also exercised a policy of compromise with other member states.

However, as the crisis escalated Poland *de facto* lost influence over the decision-making process among European countries. The center of gravity in European action was transferred to the less Russia-skeptical Germany and France. Despite the fact that the crisis in Ukraine revealed that Russia is ready to go far to secure its interests, the EU has not yet changed its strategy towards Moscow.

Despite the fact that Poland’s attitudes towards Russia actually described the situation more ‘adequately,’ Poland’s foreign policy was weakened due to compromise with others. The overall foreign policy of the EU during the Ukraine crisis was shaped more by the strategic cultures of Germany and France than Poland’s. It only began to change slightly when Russia became more aggressive, in particular after the West became directly affected by the conflict, when flight MH-17, carrying mainly European and Austrian passengers, was shot down by separatists forces in east Ukraine.

Thus, despite its increased visibility, Poland was only to a limited degree able ‘upload’ its preferences onto the joint EU actions in response to the crisis. The Europeanization of Poland’s strategic culture translated into conformity to other European states, like Germany and France. This indicates that the Europeanization of national strategic cultures is not a socialization process between equals, but a process of compromise with a certain center of gravity, which was revealed during the international crisis in Ukraine.
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