

WEBINAR | The Ukraine Crisis in 2021: Opportunities and Limits for EU Engagement



Oleksandr Chalyi

Former First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine



Oleg Voloshyn

Vice-Chair of the Committee of European Affairs of the Ukrainian Parliament



Pierre Vimont

Former Executive Secretary-General of the EEAS, Senior Fellow at Carnegie Europe



Steven Pifer

Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of the US with Responsibilities for Russia and Ukraine, Fellow at Robert Bosch Academy in Berlin



Henri Malosse

Former President of European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Chairman of Vocal Europe



Julia Tittelbach

Policy Researcher Vocal Europe (Moderator)

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WEBINAR REPORT

The Ukraine Crisis in 2021: Opportunities and Limits for EU Engagement

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*This Webinar Report was written by **Julia Tittelbach** | 14 June 2021



Rue de la Science 14, 1040 Brussels



office@vocaleurope.eu



+ 32 02 588 00 14

VOCAL EUROPE

RUE DE LA SCIENCE 14B, 1040 BRUSSELS

TEL: +32 02 588 00 14

VOCALEUROPE.EU



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Welcome Remarks by the Host and Introduction by the Moderator



The event was opened by **Henri Malosse**, honorary Chairman of Vocal Europe and Former President and Member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). He presented Vocal Europe and gave a personal introduction by sharing his experience during the EaP summit in Vilnius in 2013 and the Euromaidan protests. He explained his continued support for democratic and civic movement(s) in Ukraine while continuously promoting dialogue between Russian and Ukrainian civil society. Due to his

activities, Mr. Malosse was set on the Kremlin's "Blacklist" in 2015. Mr. Malosse further argued that the EU was a model for reconciliation, and that, therefore, the EU should be engaged in a reconciliatory process in the Ukraine crisis. He emphasised the EU's responsibility in creating the conditions in favour of de-escalation in the conflict

The moderator **Julia Tittelbach**, Policy Researcher at Vocal Europe, welcomed the speakers, the participants and the audience following the live event. She gave an introduction to the topic sketching out the recent spike in ceasefire violations in the Donbass region, the Russian military maneuver on Crimea as well as the Russian military build-up at Ukraine's borders. She outlined the structure of the event and presented the four guest-speakers.



PART I : Views from Kiev and First Q&A Round

Oleksandr Chalyi is the Former First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, former State Secretary for European Integration, and Foreign Policy Advisor to the President of Ukraine.

Mr. Chalyi drew attention to the necessity of working on two different levels in order to achieve de-escalation in the Ukraine crisis: On a *technical* level, de-escalation required the full implementation of the Minsk agreements while making full use of the Normandy Format which indeed served as the main (diplomatic) tool to achieve a full and comprehensive ceasefire. Yet, Minsk and the Normandy Format would not address the *strategic* level dealing with sustainable peace on one hand, and questions related to the European security system and the status of Ukraine within on the other. As Mr. Chalyi pointed out, there was no diplomatic format in place to deal with solving the crisis on a strategic level. In that sense, strategic initiatives were expected from the EU such as starting an inclusive dialogue and a reconciliatory process. He is convinced of the US' role to play and holds expectations towards the US-Russia summit in Geneva on June 16th.



Oleg Voloshyn is a Member of the Opposition, from Pro-Life Party in the Ukrainian Parliament. He is Vice-Chair of the Committee of European Affairs and Member of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe.

According to Mr. Voloshyn, the biggest mistake made was aiming at solving the conflict on a regional level. He highlighted the international dimension of the conflict which only arose due to the role of Ukraine in the relationship between Russia and the West. The potential of war would lie in the latter, not in the relations between Russia and Ukraine. Mr. Voloshyn argued that the failure of diplomacy was the reason for the Ukraine conflict and he emphasized the necessity of normalising relations between Kyiv and Moscow. He pointed out that the Ukrainian government would act in a hostile manner towards Russia which undermined the Kremlin's motivation to act constructively towards conflict-resolution. He also referred to the case of Mr. Medvedchuk. He underlined that foreign policy should not be hostage to domestic policy. Normalising relations with Russia would be the only opportunity “to get Moscow on board”. Mr. Voloshyn also expressed his hopes for the upcoming US-Russia summit, as both sides strived for a successful outcome. As for the European and American contribution, he supported the sanctions’ regime but pleaded for improved diplomatic competence in President Zelenky's team.



First Q&A Round

How can the EU and the US support the local population most affected by the crisis?

Mr. Voloshyn emphasized that the largest part of the country was controlled by Kyiv, and it has not become a showcase for democracy and prosperity, yet. The EU can help cities and the local population to become successful and, for example, discourage legislators from cancelling local elections in areas where military administrations hold office.

Mr. Chalyi underlined the two-level approach and the necessity of finally starting the strategic dialogue, such as organizing a special international conference on Ukraine. On the technical level, he stressed the importance of following the “philosophy of small steps”. He recognized that Ukraine was not in position to implement some provisions of the Minsk Agreements and, hence, Zelensky demanded to renovate them. Mr. Chalyi therefore affirmed to focus on ceasefire, first, before implementing the provisions step-by-step.

The EU should help in addition to the Normandy Format to promote the spirit of reconciliation, inside and around Ukraine. The Donbass crisis had to be perceived through the lens of a (new) pan-european security order.

Which format can be used to achieve a sustainable and strategic solution?

Mr. Chalyi named three options: 1) the Budapest Memorandum Format, with the UK, US, France or/and even China; 2) the Helsinki II Summit in 2025, discussing a new strategic order for Europe; 3) a new strategic format in the analogy of the Madrid conference in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He underlined the necessity to define the objectives first.

Mr. Voloshyn pointed out that it was not about formats. He reiterated the importance of normalising relations with Russia as Europe should not be hostage to “some radicals that do not wish for peace and that do not want to normalise relations”. He argued that “if there is a will there is a way”.

PART II: Expert takes and Second Q&A Round

Ambassador Vimont and **Ambassador Pifer** have, both, distinguished themselves throughout their long diplomatic career.

Pierre Vimont was the first Executive Secretary-General of the EEAS from 2010 to 2015. In 2019, he was appointed as French President Macron’s Special Envoy for the architecture of security and trust with Russia. He is also Senior Fellow at Carnegie Europe.

Mr. Vimont emphasized the great value of listening, i.e., listening “to our Ukrainian friends.” The EU could help and give advice however without imposing solutions. At the end of the day, it was for the Ukrainian people and their leaders to find it: “The solution is in Ukraine, nowhere else”.

He explained that the challenge would lie in accommodating the long-term strategy and the short-term measure. The essence of diplomacy was the understanding that succeeding in an agreement required an understanding of the long-game and the broader picture first. Only then comes the pragmatic approach putting the border picture into motion. Applied to the Ukraine case, he outlines that the agreements and formats to implement them are existent and it would be not advisable to drop all of them for the sake of a long-term agreement as it implies the loss of the pragmatic approach.



Currently, Europe would be missing the ability to define the long-term goal, i.e., European prosperity, stability and security order and how to achieve it. Mr. Vimont pointed out the existing agreements, but underlined that Europe would still witness a crumbling of the values and principles agreed on. Hence the question arose: How to rebuild the security order that had been dismantled? He voiced scepticism about bringing in the P5 or China to the debate. He highlighted the platforms where the Ukraine crisis could be put on the agenda, such as the OSCE or the NATO-Russia Council.

Referring to the sanctions against Belarus and the current debates, he also recognized that the mindset was not right at the moment to settle the Ukraine conflict. He reiterated the necessity to take pragmatic steps to create confidence for further discussions. Diplomacy would in fact mean being firm on one side, and launching a dialogue on the other. However, the EU was not in a relevant position to launch a long dialogue with Russia (referring to HR/VP Borrell's visit to Moscow.) Hence, the EU would need to rebuild a strong position and improve its acts as a relevant player to the EaP countries, which will make the Union a relevant interlocutor for Russia, too.

With regards to Ukraine, Mr. Vimont pointed out that "we have to work with what we've got", namely the Free Trade Agreement, the Association Agreement and the remaining potential for cooperation. The EU should enhance its role in advising Ukraine on how to improve the rule of law, economic reforms, and fight against corruption.

He supported the Minsk Agreements and perceived the French and German to be open for enlarging the Normandy Format. However, the question of who would be interested to actually join still remained.

He concluded that both elements, short and long-term objectives needed to be joined: "You need to know where you go, and then implement it on a daily basis." As for international summits on Ukraine he had cautious doubts as those would have to be very well prepared from the ground, and would require a strong position.

Steven Pifer is currently a fellow at the Robert Bosch Academy in Berlin and a non-resident senior fellow with the Brookings Institution. As a former diplomat, he was also special assistant to the president, and senior director for Russia, Ukraine and Eurasia on the National Security Council.



Mr. Pifer focussed on the Kremlin's motives and interests, i.e., maintaining Ukraine in its sphere of influence. He explained that understanding them would be part of the solution, because a significant part of the solution was decided in Moscow. He argued that de-escalation seemed unlikely, due to Russian behaviour in the past. If normalisation of relations seemed hard, this would be grounded mostly in Russian behaviour pushing Ukraine towards the West. He outlined that a simmering conflict

benefitted the Kremlin, as it slowed down progress and reform implementation, i.e., the shift towards the West. Moreover, Mr. Pifer argued that the conflict was not only about geo-politics but also about the Kremlin's regime survival.

He also supported the Normandy Format, at least until a better and more successful format was found. Until then, one should focus on Moscow's cost-benefit calculations in order to negotiate on the Donbass. Yet, he sees the challenge in the EU maintaining its unity on addressing the Ukraine crisis and Russia. He mentions the challenges connected to Chancellor Merkel's departure in October 2021 and its impact on not only the EU in general, but on its relationship with Putin in particular.

Regarding the European response, according to Mr. Pifer, sanctions had a major impact on Russia's behaviour, hence more sanctions would be possible. As for military assistance, he perceived a rather low motivation on the EU side to implement a military dimension.

Regarding the US, he pointed out that President Biden would know Ukraine well and would understand the Russian challenge. The President would dedicate time and invest in a process to resolve the conflict. Supporting but not replacing the Franco- German effort would be a valid option. In fact, the US had to be engaged in any strategic debate on the geopolitics and security order in Europe.

For the upcoming summit in Geneva, he expects President Biden to draw red lines to Russia, to explore areas where interests coincide and cooperation is possible and to address tough questions such as Ukraine. Eventually, Mr. Pifer also agreed with Mr. Vimont on the necessity and role of domestic reforms in Ukraine.

Second Q&A Round

Taking into account its own interest, would Russia really commit to solving the conflict? Would there be added value in adding the HR/VP Borrell to the Normandy Group?

Oleksandr Chalych stressed that Russia had to accept the will of the Ukrainian people and nation. Just as Ukraine had to respect the rights of Russia with regards to security and stability. He elaborated on four reasons for the Ukraine crisis: The geopolitical rivalry, the (geo-) economic rivalry, the post-colonial conflict and the internal conflict. This would require a reconciliation process inside and outside of Ukraine while finding solutions to all four dimensions. He reiterated the necessity to find strategic solutions, and the critical role of the EU and the US.

Pierre Vimont agreed and drew attention to the challenge of conciliating opposing views - which was in fact a major issue. He stressed that it was eventually for the Ukrainian people to decide on their future. Yet, discussing Ukrainian membership to the EU or NATO would only feed the conflict further on. Mr. Vimont reiterated the necessity of thinking and acting on a practical and strategic level, in the short- and in the long term.

With regards to the Geneva meeting, he expressed his hopes that President Biden and President Putin would succeed in having a strategic talk. This summit, however, should not prevent us from looking at what happens on the ground on a practical level.

Steven Pifer agreed and also emphasized the need to work on the pragmatics on the ground. He expressed his modest expectations towards the summit in Geneva and highlighted the "not now, but not never"- approach regarding the MAP for Ukraine.

What should and could be done with regards to Nord Stream 2, or is the discussion on Ukrainian and European security connected to discussions on Nord Stream 2 exaggerated ?

Oleksandr Chalyi recognized that the pipeline will start operating. He declared his support for the suggestion by Mr. Ischinger (i.e., a Moratorium, elaborating a special regime on using NS2).

Pierre Vimont agreed but added a comment on the modification of the European energy market due to the European Green Deal. He stressed the importance of supporting Ukraine in the country's adaptation to this transformation and in the arrival of a new generation of energy sources. In that sense, discussions on (new) cooperation with Ukraine would be more useful than debating on the construction and operation of NS2.

Stefen Pifer pointed out that Washington was not inclined to raise tensions with Berlin or the EU and expressed his hope on Berlin's engagement in strengthening Ukraine's "energy position". This topic might be on the agenda for the G7 and NATO summits to come.

Oleg Voloshyn sees the Nord Stream 2 pipeline as a benchmark, as a Russian project and demonstration of power, just like the Turk-Stream pipeline. He also highlighted the necessity for Ukraine to improve its energy infrastructure. He defines the EU, Ukraine and Russia as commercial partners. Mr. Voloshyn reiterated Ukraine's position as a transit country which required, indeed, normalisation and reconciliation with Russia.

Closing Statements by the Speakers

Oleksandr Chalyi thanked the panel for an open-minded discussion. Reconstruction of a new European security order would be a long process. He argued for the implementation of small practical steps on the grounds, such as a successful ceasefire in the Donbass. He called for starting a strategic dialogue with the aim to settle the conflict in the long-term.



Agreeing with Mr. Pifer, Pierre **Vimont** pointed out that the major problem was about Russia - about the area of conflicting interests and views on the eastern part of the European continent. In order to overcome this challenge, Mr Vimont highlighted the necessity for the EU to finally clarify its idea and understanding about its own role, interests and objectives. Reconciliation and peace would be at the heart of the EU. He suggested that, if the EU wanted to use this recipe, it would need to start quickly and combine firmness and dialogue in its approach.



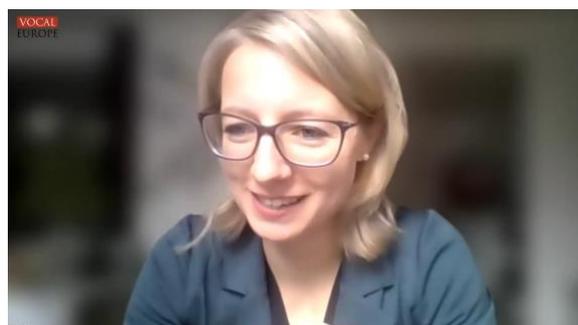
Steven Pifer underlined the necessity to get back to the situation between August and October 2020. Whether or not to normalise relations with Russia and at which price, this would be for the Ukrainian people to decide. He further expressed his hope for the EU and the US to continue their support for Ukraine.

Oleg Voloshyn urged the involved actors to act quickly and referred to an entire “lost generation” impacted by the conflict with Russia. He stated that no one in Russia would be against Ukraine’s domestic reforms. Yet, Russia would not want to have a malign and hostile neighbour (Ukraine). Hence, he argued that the membership (NATO) debate was closed for years to come in order to achieve normalisation of relations with Russia. He concluded that Ukraine would become economically prosperous if it became a bridge between East and West- instead of a frontline.



Closing Remarks

Henri Malosse and **Julia Tittelbach** thanked the guest-speakers for their valuable contribution and expertise input, as well as the audience for the active participation.



Mr. Malosse concluded that “some people like to move Ukraine to the East or the West, but Ukraine is where it is”. However, we would need to accept the reality and position of Ukraine, and “cannot make Ukraine choose between its father and its mother”.



He elaborated that for a strong Ukraine, foreign investment was needed which, in return, required sustainable peace. He concluded that reconciliation was not only a question of diplomacy or a task for leaders and states, but a task for civil society, citizens and business people as well as for members of parliaments.

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RUE DE LA SCIENCE 14B, 1040 BRUSSELS

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