To what extent does the Donbas conflict affect the cooperation of Ukraine with the EU and NATO?
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To what extent does the Donbas conflict affect the cooperation of Ukraine with the EU and NATO?

Bachelor Thesis

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Table of Content

1. Introduction

In recent years, a large number of researchers have paid increasing attention to the Ukrainian crisis. After the Revolution of Dignity, ousting of President Yanukovych, the annexation of the Crimean peninsula by the Russian Federation, and the outbreak of violence in the eastern part of the country, the Ukrainian foreign policy has considerably changed its direction. The former and the current Presidents, Petro Poroshenko and Volodymyr Zelenskiy, have demonstrated a significant commitment of Ukraine to Western political values and a great willingness to strengthen links with its European and North-American partners (Pridham, 2014). Nevertheless, a much-debated question is whether the ongoing Donbas fighting has an impact on the relations of Ukraine with the Western countries and, if so, what is the nature of this impact. Consequently, scholars have long discussed the effects of the given conflict on the Ukraine-EU and -NATO relationship, particularly on the aspect of cooperation between Ukraine and the given organizations. For this reason, the next section will present the above-mentioned academic debates and the limitations and gaps of the existing scholarship.

There is a large number of research papers (Lieven, 1997; Kuzio, 1998; Hillion, 2007; Solonenko 2011; Costea, 2011) detailing the relations between Ukraine and the Euro-Atlantic institutions that were published prior to the beginning of the conflict in Donbas. Nevertheless, due to a strong interest in investigating the relationship between the Donbas conflict and the collaboration of Ukraine with the EU and NATO, this bachelor thesis will analyze only those academic works that were issued after the year 2014. In addition, as there is much of the current literature on the Donbas conflict in multiple languages, it was decided to study the Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking scholarship in order to broaden the scope of this thesis and conduct a more thorough investigation.

A large body of literature considers Ukrainian partnership with the Euro-Atlantic organizations as a result of escalating relations between Russia and Western states (Haukkala, 2015; Mearsheimer, 2015; O'Hanlon, 2017, Wolff, 2015). In doing so, it primarily relies on a realist tradition, which implies that world actors are mainly concerned with reshaping international order under the condition of anarchy (Robinson, 2016). Furthermore, according to O'Hanlon (2017) and Wolff (2015), the main reason for the outbreak of the conflict in Donbas lies in Russia's objection to NATO's enlargement. This view is supported by Mearsheimer (2015), who claims that Ukraine has become a battlefield of great powers,

which corresponds to the main notions of realism. As noted by the author (Mearsheimer, 2015), NATO's decision to provide military assistance to Ukrainian armed forces can only worsen the situation by causing an escalation of hostilities in Donbas and spreading the fighting into the other areas of the country.

After examining the academic literature, it was found that a significant number of the published studies are primarily concerned with explaining the conflict and its impact on the assistance provided to Ukraine by the EU and NATO from a geopolitical perspective. The given perspective neglects the role of institutions and views the world from the positions of rivalry and competition. Investigating the Ukrainian-EU and -NATO interdependence from the geopolitical approach would obfuscate the relevant levels of a more intricate reality than a geopolitical perspective assumes.

Therefore, the given thesis will utilize a neoliberal institutionalist approach for the following two reasons. Firstly, it considers institutions rather than states as the main actors in the international arena. Secondly, it assumes, as the relationship between Ukraine and the EU and NATO goes back from the moment when Ukraine gained its independence, the Donbas conflict simply added another layer to this interdependence, rather than was a starting point of it.

This thesis aims to explore the relationship between the Donbas conflict and the dynamics of collaboration between Ukraine and both the EU and NATO. Consequently, the main research question is formulated as: 'To what extent does the Donbas conflict affect the cooperation of Ukraine with the EU and NATO?'. In addition, in order to conduct a more in-depth analysis, the two subquestions were identified. They allow to limit the scope of the given research work by examining only a few types of cooperation, which takes place between the mentioned organizations and the Ukrainian side. Therefore, the subquestions are formulated as follows:

1. *In what way does economic and humanitarian cooperation between Ukraine and the EU and NATO occur?*

2. *How does the Donbas conflict affect military relations between Ukraine and the EU and NATO?*

The thesis consists of five main sections. After the introduction, the second part presents certain relevant ideas from the theory of neoliberal institutionalism. The next part

suggests clarifications of the selected methodology. The fourth part is considered the largest and the most crucial component of the whole research and provides a discussion of the Ukrainian-EU and -NATO cooperation in economic, humanitarian, and military spheres. Lastly, the conclusion part is composed of the findings and weaknesses of the given thesis.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Key elements of the theory of neoliberal institutionalism

In order to answer the main research question, the given thesis relies on the theory of neoliberal institutionalism. It appeared in the mid-1970s and was introduced by Keohane and Nye (1977) primarily as a critique of neorealist assumptions. A great number of academic works, elaborating on neoliberal institutionalism, have emerged since then, making it one of the most prominent theories in the field of international relations (Keohane, 1984; Goldstein, 2000; Koremenos, Lipson, Snidal, 2001; Hawkins, Lake, Nielson, et al., 2006). Moreover, with the spread of globalization and the rising importance of various non-state actors, the assumptions, initially presented by Keohane and Nye (1977), have gained an advantage over the other schools of thought (Milner, 2009).

Despite the fact that neoliberal institutionalism appeared as a perspective opposed to neorealism, the given approaches share many theoretical notions. Firstly, the scholars of both theories recognize the existence of anarchy in the international system and argue that it leads to more prospects for cooperation. Nevertheless, neoliberal institutionalists assume that the power of institutions diminishes the consequences of anarchy. In addition, both neoliberal institutionalists and realists admit that states are relevant players in the international arena. However, the neoliberal institutionalist scholarship also argues that non-state actors can also play a pivotal role in the international system.

One of the key assumptions of neoliberal institutionalism, as it was already mentioned, refers to the emphasis of the role of non-state actors, such as international institutions, multinational corporations, and non-governmental organizations, in the international system. Nevertheless, the most attention in the traditional neoliberal institutionalist scholarship is paid to the role of international institutions. According to neoliberal institutionalist literature, states are willing to engage with international institutions if the following gains are ensured: decreased insecurity, decreased transaction costs, and

enhanced flow of information (Keohane, 1984). The given benefits are secured by international institutions' work, which provides assistance in signing institutional arrangements between states and preventing them from further desertion. Keohane and Martin (1995) particularly stress the importance of the role of institutions in providing information, which, as they claim, reduces states' incentives to cheat. In doing so, institutions encourage states to be more careful about the implications of their acts in the course of time, by creating a 'shadow of the future' (Keohane & Axelrod, 1985, p. 232). Besides, in contrast to a neorealist tradition, as states are interested only in obtaining their own gains, they are not concerned with the benefits of other states. In addition, according to Keohane and Axelrod (1985), international institutions can serve as platforms for mitigating inter-state conflicts by increasing trust and modifying their states' attitudes towards each other. In order to demonstrate the power of institutions, Keohane and Martin (1995) provide their empirical findings of the effectiveness of the European Court of Justice. The authors argue that the ECJ encourages states to avoid cheating, decreases transaction costs, and facilitates their cooperation.

Inter-state cooperation is considered to be another major component of the neoliberal institutionalist school of thought. In comparison to neorealist scholarship, which emphasizes the relevance of military capabilities and conflicts, Keohane and Nye (1977) focused on the issue of cooperation instead. With the rapid spread of international organizations and significant expansion of the number of their members, the given assumptions received empirical confirmation. It has to be noted that neorealism admits the possibility of cooperation among states similarly to neoliberal institutionalism. Nevertheless, neoliberal institutionalism has developed a concept of institutionalized cooperation, which means that states' actions are governed by the norms and standards prescribed in protocols and accords.

Another important assumption of a neoliberal institutionalist theory refers to its particular focus on other types of power except for military capabilities. In contrast with neorealist scholarship, the given school of thought considers modification in subject areas, rather states military power (Keohane and Nye, 1977).

The given thesis will use a theory of neoliberal institutionalism within the scope of the given research. This decision was made due to the fact that other grand theories, though widely applied in the field of political studies, particularly in the realm of international

relations, and having many similarities with the chosen theoretical approach, do not consider a significant number of factors, which play an important role in investigating the chosen research question. Consequently, the neoliberal institutionalist approach was defended, as it allows to investigate the complexities of cooperation between Ukraine and Euro-Atlantic institutions.

3. Methodology

The following section presents the methodology, the case, and data, which were chosen to conduct the given research. The research question in this thesis is concerned with the relationship between the two variables, which are the Donbas conflict and Ukrainian-EU and -NATO cooperation. Following this, the former serves as an independent variable, while the latter is a dependent one. In order to develop an answer to the main research question, the given thesis will conduct a qualitative methodology. Furthermore, in terms of the methods used, content and discourse analysis were chosen, as they serve as the most appropriate research tools for analyzing selected data regarding the objectives of the given thesis. It can also be noted that this investigation takes the form of a single-case study. In terms of the selected data, the given thesis will analyze primary sources, such as the addresses, speeches, and messages of the Ukrainian and Western officials.

3.1. Research Design and case selection

A single-case study is the most appropriate research design for this paper. It allows to conduct an in-depth investigation of a case, providing internally valid results (Halperin & Heath, 2017). A single-N study is also considered observational in its nature, as it implies that a researcher does not conduct any experiments but only observes political developments (Barakso, Sabet, Schaffner, 2014). Although the given design is a single-country case study and its scope does not go beyond the case of Ukraine, it can be considered a comparative type of research design, as it contains a comparison within one particular case. However, there is a risk of low external validity, as the researcher only focuses on one specific case (Halperin & Heath, 2017).

The conflict in Donbas was selected as a case study for four main reasons. Firstly, the Donbas conflict represents the ongoing military clash in the middle of the European

continent. According to official figures, more than 13,000 people have already died and continue to do so until nowadays (Hauter, 2021). Secondly, this conflict represents an example of hybrid warfare, where a great number of different state and non-state actors are intertwined. Thirdly, due to the hostilities in its eastern part, Ukraine, as never before, has appeared on the international agenda. And, finally, the given conflict had significantly escalated in April 2021, when a large number of Russian troops conducted military training along the Russian-Ukrainian borders. Even though the conflict in Donbas is considered to be frozen by many researchers, violence can easily occur with renewed vigor and, therefore, further escalation is not excluded (Tudoroiu, 2016).

3.2. Content and discourse analysis

Content analysis is a method for analyzing textual materials to find evidence regarding actors' views and ideas (Halperin & Heath, 2017). The major benefit of this approach is that it allows to gain access to information, which a researcher cannot acquire through face-to-face contact with a relevant actor. In addition, the given method is considered to be unobtrusive; therefore, it allows to avoid bias while collecting the needed material. It also has to be noted that this type of analysis suggests that the chosen research question must be answered by revealing the underlying meanings, objectives, and reasons inside the text. Consequently, it can be concluded that qualitative content analysis helps a researcher to expose hidden content of textual data (Weber, 1990).

In order to conduct a content analysis, the given thesis will develop a coding framework. Firstly, it has to be mentioned that the units of analysis of the given research are words and, therefore, the frequency with which they appear will be presented. Secondly, the codewords, which are related to the main concepts of this thesis, will be identified. Consequently, 19 codewords, which are concerned with the conflict in the Eastern part of Ukraine and the EU- and NATO-Ukrainian collaboration were determined. The following codewords are cooperation, (financial, military) assistance, support, (to) stand with, partnership, partner, integration, (to) help, membership, (macro) economic stability, east, Donbas, EU, NATO, Ukraine, Euro-Atlantic, relations, security, association. The given words were selected because, in one way or another, they refer to the variables identified in the main research question. Therefore, the researcher will seek for the given codewords in the

examined sources and count the frequency of their usage. The coding was done manually by the researcher and is presented in Appendix A.

Discourse analysis is used for examining the relations between discourse and a specific context (Halperin & Heath, 2017). The researcher aims to investigate the circumstances and conditions in which particular discursive practices were produced (Laffey & Weldes, 2004). In order to conduct a discourse analysis, in the given thesis, the overall tone of the speeches will be examined. More specifically, attitudes of the leaders towards the main topics of this research will be investigated and described.

It was decided to use a mixed method in the given research, as it allows to obtain more relevant findings by analyzing both the discursive practices and contents of the chosen primary sources. In addition, these research methods complement each other in case if a researcher misses certain points. More specifically, if the researcher neglects particular aspects of the context, there is possibility to find them in the official documents by exploring their content.

3.3. Data selection

The selected data for the given thesis are official transcripts of speeches and addresses of the most prominent Ukrainian and European leaders. The time limits for the data selection process are set between March 2014, when the first separatist protests started in the Donetsk oblast, and April 2021, when the conflict significantly escalated due to the sudden concentration of the Russian troops engaged in military training near the Russian-Ukrainian borders.

The official documents used to answer the main research question are divided into two main categories. The first category is concerned with the official transcripts of speeches and addresses delivered by the Ukrainian politicians. In contrast, the second category includes the speeches made by Western political figures. Therefore, the given thesis analyzes the following documents: firstly, the message of the current President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, to the Ukrainian Parliament, Verkhovna Rada, and his speech during the EU-Ukraine summit. Secondly, the two recent addresses of the former Ukrainian President, Petro Poroshenko. And, thirdly, the speech of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba, during the joint press conference of Ukraine and NATO. It has to be noted that all of

the above-mentioned speeches were delivered in the years 2020 and 2021 and, therefore, reflect the latest developments in the Ukrainian-EU and -NATO relationship.

Due to the researcher's language expertise — fluency in Ukrainian — the researcher was able to use primary sources from multiple languages. For that reason, the speeches of the Ukrainian leaders were examined in their original language, which is Ukrainian. Therefore, the inclusion of local sources into the analysis helped the researcher compare how the Ukrainian-EU and NATO cooperation issues were reflected in English and Ukrainian languages. In addition, it was decided to analyze the speeches of the two latest Ukrainian Presidents, as they allowed the researcher to observe the differences between the attitudes of the main authorities of the Ukrainian state and compare them with the attitudes of the Western political actors.

The second category of primary sources includes the speeches of the following Western officials: the NATO Secretary-General, Jens Stoltenberg, the former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Angela Merkel, the Executive Vice-President of the European Commission, Valdis Dombrovskis, and the former President of the European Council, Donald Tusk. Consequently, the next section will provide the main findings obtained from the analysis of the discussed sources.

4. Discussion

It can be clearly observed from the analysis that there are many similarities and differences between the statements made by the Ukrainian and European leaders. The former and the latter view the Ukrainian-EU and -NATO cooperation differently, and their varying attitudes are reflected in their discourses. Moreover, there is also a significant distinction between the discourses of the messages delivered by the Ukrainian authorities. The discussion part is divided into two main sections. In the following section, the findings will be presented, which will allow to answer the first research question.

4.1. Economic cooperation as a defining feature of international system

The first subquestion is concerned with the economic and humanitarian aspects of cooperation between Ukraine and the EU and NATO. It has to be noted that despite the fact that the given issues were addressed by the officials only partially, certain relevant findings

were obtained as a result of the analysis. Firstly, it can be seen that varying components of economic cooperation are mentioned in the speeches of the Ukrainian and European leaders. More specifically, Angela Merkel, Donald Tusk, and Volodymir Zelenskiy pay particular attention to the importance of the trade relations between the EU and Ukraine (Appendix A, Table 1.1; Table 1.2). Furthermore, there is a clear common feature in the speeches of Merkel and Zelenskiy, as they both emphasize the significance of greater integration of Ukrainian markets with the European ones (Appendix A, Table 1.1; Table 1.2). The opening of markets and expansion of trade links between Ukraine and the EU constitute the main provisions of the Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, which came into effect in the year 2017; they are also mentioned by the former President of the European Council, Donald Tusk (Appendix A, Table 1.2). He argues that the signing of the given agreements has significantly improved the Ukrainian economic situation. The given finding is also reflected in the academic literature. As Dragneva and Wolczuk (2013) demonstrate, 'negotiating a binding and comprehensive agreement on deep integration with the EU has been a long-term priority for Ukraine' (p. 213).

By looking at the speech of the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, it can be observed that she focuses on the issue of economic relations more than any other previously mentioned leader (Appendix A, Table 1.2). In addition, the speech of Angela Merkel has another common point with the speech of the current Ukrainian President. It can be seen that both leaders have emphasized the aspect of economic stability. As discussed in the theoretical framework, this example reinforces one of the most prominent notions of neoliberal institutionalism, which assumes that economic interdependence and extensive cooperation between states are the main characteristics of world politics. Furthermore, the literature that supports the given finding implies that the German position towards the Ukrainian crisis relies on the rule and power of institutions (Daehnhardt & Handl, 2018).

In terms of the discrepancies between the discourses of the Western and Ukrainian leaders, it can be noted that in contrast to the European authorities, Ukrainian Presidents constantly stressed the relevance of the Ukrainian integration into the EU and NATO (Appendix A, Table 1.1). Regarding Western politicians, they primarily use words and phrases, which refer to partnership, friendship, and cooperation. Nevertheless, only the speech, delivered by Donald Tusk, contains words, which directly or indirectly signal the

objective of the EU to see Ukraine as a fully integrated member of the given organization. (Appendix A, Table 1.2). It can be noted that the relevance of the reform agenda is an evident discourse in the speeches made by the leaders of the EU and NATO, and the politicians present it in a similar manner. More specifically, Valdis Dombrovskis and Jens Stoltenberg emphasize the support, which will be provided to Ukraine in order to secure its developments on the way to achieving European standards (Appendix A, Table 1.2).Moreover, in the speech of the Executive Vice-President of the European Commission, an exact amount of the financial assistance provided to Ukraine, is determined.

The humanitarian cooperation between the EU and Ukraine is briefly mentioned only by President Zelenskiy, who emphasizes its importance in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic (Appendix A, Table 1.1). Therefore, the given topic is not dominant in the Ukrainian politicians' messages and is entirely absent in the speeches from the European side. The existing academic scholarship has supported this particular finding; it assumes that the support provided by the EU to Ukraine is insufficient, especially in the spheres of humanitarian interventions, medical care, and rescuing (Tsivatyi, 2018). The lack of humanitarian support from the EU to Ukraine can be explained by the EU's own challenges.

With regard to the economic cooperation between Ukraine and NATO, it can be clearly observed that the given issue was discussed only by President Zelenskiy, as he mentioned the amount of the financial aid provided to Ukraine by the Congress of United States (Appendix A, Table 1.1). However, by analyzing the academic literature, it can be remarked that Belkin (2016) and Szeligowski (2016) both refer to the consequences of NATO's Warsaw summit for the prospects of cooperation with its partners and put a particular emphasis on the increasing economic support for Ukraine. This involves the provision of funding for addressing the issues of cybersecurity, control and communication possibilities, standardization, and recovery of the veterans of the military activities in Donbas. In the same vein, Fasola and Wood (2021), in their article, notice that the Comprehensive Assistance Package, which entered into force after the summit in Warsaw, implies establishing a great number of trust funds, which have to ensure considerable financial support to Ukraine.

In this subsection, various aspects of the EU- and NATO-Ukrainian collaboration in the economic and humanitarian spheres are discussed. By analyzing the primary sources, it can be clearly seen that cooperation in the economic sphere constitutes the most prominent

and significant part of the cooperation between Ukraine and the EU. It mostly takes the form of mutually beneficial trade, which is secured by bilateral arrangements, such as the Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. In addition, the EU provides Ukraine with direct financial support and humanitarian relief. Nevertheless, as also indicated by the literature, the EU's humanitarian support is deficient and does not correspond with the real needs in Ukraine. In addition, the speeches and the academic scholarship demonstrate that the economic collaboration of Ukraine with NATO is also ensured. However, it does not go beyond the form of direct fund transfers that are aimed at improving the state of the Ukrainian military. Therefore, in line with the neoliberal institutionalist framework, the given findings show that the main emphasis in the discussed speeches is made on economic interdependence and institutionalized cooperation (Milner, 2009).

4.2. The conflict in Donbas as a catalyst for the Ukrainian-NATO military cooperation

This section will present the debates about the military cooperation between Ukraine, the EU, and NATO. Furthermore, as the second subquestion is related to the Donbas conflict, its impact on the EU- and NATO-Ukrainian collaboration in the military sector will be discussed.

Before diving deeper into the analysis, it has to be noted that NATO and its assistance to Ukraine are mentioned in all the speeches of the Ukrainian politicians. Nevertheless, there are considerable differences in the way the former and current Presidents of Ukraine, as well as the Minister of the Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, present their attitudes towards the given issue.

Firstly, it can be clearly observed that the NATO discourse is dominant in the speech of Petro Poroshenko, while Volodymir Zelenskiy paid more attention to the relations with the EU (Appendix A, Table 1.1). Moreover, the latter mentions NATO solely as a partner of Ukraine, whereas the former constantly emphasizes the necessity of the full Ukrainian integration into the North Atlantic Alliance. Besides, as the speeches of former President Poroshenko were delivered a year apart from each other, there is also a possibility to observe how his attitudes and, therefore, discursive practices changed over time. By comparing two of his addresses between each other, it can be seen that his objectives of the Ukrainian rapprochement with NATO have become more evident. It has to be noted that the second speech of the former President starts with the significant criticism of the strategies of the

current Ukrainian government and, more specifically, Volodymir Zelenskiy as a leader of the country. Petro Poroshenko blames the state officials for betraying the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Ukraine (Appendix A, Table 1.1). Moreover, he claims that Ukraine appears on the agenda of the Western states less frequently, implying that further stages for membership are more challenging than ever. In order to overcome this issue, the President suggests a number of steps, which have to be taken with the aim of returning the previous achievements on the way to Ukrainian integration into NATO and the EU. Therefore, despite the fact that both presidents' attitudes regarding the Ukrainian's foreign policy direction are similar, their speeches significantly differ. It also can be concluded that as the country's leaders change, the government officials' discourse also changes.

Secondly, in contrast to Volodymir Zelenskiy, Petro Poroshenko puts a particular emphasis on NATO's security assistance. He argues that the national security of Ukraine is fully dependent on its status on the way to joining the North Atlantic Alliance. Consequently, he undermines the efficiency of the international agreements, more specifically the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, and focuses on the relevance of the full NATO membership. On the other hand, it can be seen that Volodymir Zelenskiy constantly emphasizes the importance of cooperation between the given organization and Ukraine. Therefore, after examining the speeches of both Presidents, it can be concluded that the neoliberal institutionalist approach was more dominant in the speeches delivered by Volodymir Zelenskiy because, in his speeches, he primarily relied on the aspects of economic rather than security cooperation (Appendix A, Table 1.1).

The researcher obtained another important empirical finding after examining the speech of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. It has been discovered that, in comparison to other above-mentioned Ukrainian leaders, Dmytro Kuleba approaches the issue of the conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine in order to show how it is connected to the assistance provided by the West (Appendix A, Table 1.1). It can be seen that Petro Poroshenko and Volodymir Zelenskiy also mentioned the conflict in Donbas, but they referred to it primarily in the context of Russian intervention and aggression. Nevertheless, Dmytro Kuleba argues that due to the recent escalation of the hostilities in the eastern region, enhanced cooperation between Ukraine and NATO is expected (Appendix A, Table 1.1). Therefore, according to the Minister's speech, the Donbas conflict has an impact on the

Ukraine-NATO relations. Moreover, this finding also supports the notion that the Donbas conflict cannot be considered as a root cause of the cooperation between Ukraine and the Euro-Atlantic institutions. Nevertheless, it adds a further layer to the given cooperation. Academic literature supports this finding, arguing that the Ukrainian crisis and, more specifically, the conflict in Donbas, convinced the NATO member-states not only to continue providing pre-determined support to the Ukrainian armed forces but to define the new directions of the Ukraine-NATO cooperation and, consequently, significantly expand its scope (Belkin, Mix, & Woehrel, 2014).

In regard to the analyzed materials, the researcher can identify one common feature between the speeches of the Western and Ukrainian leaders. Jens Stoltenberg, Dmytro Kuleba, and Volodymyr Zelenskiy refer to the status of Ukraine as an Enhanced Opportunities Partner (EOP) and view it as a significant step of Ukraine towards the integration into the Alliance (Appendix A, Table 1.1; Table 1.2). The existing literature has also addressed the topic of the EOP of Ukraine. It is argued that the main objective of this partnership is to ensure consistency and adherence to the standards and norms of NATO (Tsivatyi, 2018). Similarly, it can be observed that Volodymyr Zelenskiy puts a particular emphasis on the consistency and compatibility of the Ukrainian armed forces to the standards of the NATO forces.

In terms of the speech given by the NATO Secretary-General, it is evident that Jens Stoltenberg relies primarily on the practical aspects of the support provided, as, in contrast to other leaders, he explicitly mentions its amount and the forms in which the given assistance takes place (Appendix A, Table 1.2). Moreover, it can be clearly seen that the leader emphasizes the importance of the defense and security institutions in Ukraine. Therefore, neoliberal institutionalism here is connected, as focus on the power of institutions rather than any other actors is the main premise of the given approach. In addition, it can be noted that Jens Stoltenberg does not imply a possible further admission of Ukraine as a member of NATO. Such a discourse can be explained by the fact that Ukraine is considered a 'buffer zone between the West and Russia' (Wolff, 2015, p. 1118).

After analyzing the above-mentioned sources, the given thesis concludes that even though the leaders in their speeches emphasized assistance in the military sphere, they implied ensuring it in an institutionalized, cooperative, and protective way, rather than

invading the territory of another state or using weapons. Unlike traditional realist theories, the findings of the given research assume that despite the fact that NATO is a military alliance, the main emphasis of its cooperation with the Ukrainian side is put on the economic aspects. These empirical findings support the neoliberal institutionalist notion that power in the international system can be exerted in multiple ways, except for demonstrating military capabilities.

In the given section, some aspects of the EU- and NATO-Ukrainian cooperation were presented by looking at the official transcripts of the speeches. It can be observed that military cooperation between Ukraine and NATO occurs in varying forms; however, most frequently, it takes the form of military exercises and training, conducted within the armed forces and naval forces in the region of the Black Sea, reforms in order to improve Ukrainian defense capacity and ensuring improvement of the militaries. In addition, there are a number of differences, which were identified in the attitudes of the Ukrainian leaders towards the military collaboration with the NATO member-states.

By looking at the discourse, it can be observed that although the leaders of the country change, the speeches constantly emphasize the issues of military cooperation. Nevertheless, divisions become more apparent since the leaders have started to mention the objectives of the given cooperation in their messages, as the current president Zelenskiy emphasizes the aspects of the partnership. In contrast, the former leader Poroshenko focuses on the integration components. Therefore, the researcher can conclude that the individual leaders do not influence the discourse of the official Ukrainian government. The discourse stays the same as presidents and governments change, only the extent of Ukrainian closeness and cooperation with the NATO member-states changes. It has to be noted that, unlike what geopolitical literature argues, after looking at these official statements and speeches, emphasis is mainly put on institutionalized military cooperation, which means prevention of conflict, exchange of ideas and knowledge, and respect to the rule of institutions.

5. Conclusion

The aim of the given thesis was to investigate the relationship between the Donbas conflict and Ukrainian-EU and -NATO cooperation in economic, humanitarian and military spheres. Therefore, the research question was formulated as: '*To what extent does the Donbas conflict*

affect the cooperation of Ukraine with the EU and NATO?' First of all, the given research questioned the notions of geopolitical perspective, which viewed the conflict in Donbas as rivalry between great powers and neglected relevance of international institutions. Relying on the theoretical assumptions of neoliberal institutionalism, it was claimed, that the interdependence of Ukraine with the Euro-Atlantic institutions has started from the period when Ukraine became independent and, therefore, the Donbas armed conflict was not the starting point of the Ukrainian-EU and -NATO cooperation, nevertheless, it has made the reality more complicated and sophisticated by adding a new layer to the aspects of Ukrainian collaboration with the EU and NATO.

By applying the theoretical assumptions of the neoliberal institutionalist approach, the forms in which the Ukrainian-EU and -NATO cooperation occurs were explained. Firstly, the thesis revealed, that military cooperation between Ukraine and NATO occurs in a protective and institutionalized manner and is aimed at the conflict reduction, rather than its proliferation. Secondly, the attitudes and discourses of the Ukrainian leaders remain unchanged in terms of the Ukrainian foreign policy direction, however differ in terms of the degree of connections between Ukraine and its partners. Thirdly, a Donbas conflict has an impact on the Ukrainian-EU and -NATO cooperation, however it can only foster the already existing relationships.

In terms of the limitations, it can be claimed, that as the scope of the given thesis is limited, that is why a researcher does not have an opportunity to analyze a significant number of primary sources. Therefore, only the most recent and most prominent speeches were chosen. In addition, a researcher has faced unexpected challenges during the data analysis process. As it appeared, that the chosen primary sourced are limited, because most of the evidence they contain is overgeneralized and therefore, it becomes increasingly difficult to obtain some specific research findings.

In regards to further research, this thesis has analyzed only three forms of cooperation between Ukraine and the Euro-Atlantic institutions. In order to develop another study, a researcher can particularly focus on the aspects of technical or scientific cooperation, which were not addressed in a given thesis. In addition, as one of the main limitations of the given study is the increased generalizability of the examined sources, a researcher can rely on the

texts of international agreements or accords rather than speeches in order to obtain more evidence and findings.

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Appendix A: Qualitative content analysis coding tables

Codes: cooperation, (financial, military) assistance, support, (to) stand with, partnership, partner, integration, (to) help, membership, (macro) economic stability, east, EU, NATO, Ukraine, Euro-Atlantic, relations, security, association

Table 1.1: Ukrainian leaders

Leader's name	Codes presented	Frequency
Volodymir Zelenskiy (1)	EU, support, partner, NATO, partnership, integration '***Європейський Союз***, США, Канада, Велика Британія, Туреччина та інші наші партнери продовжують незмінну ***підтримку*** України.' 'Конгрес США затвердив ***військову допомогу*** Україні на суму 250 мільйонів доларів.' 'А Україна отримала статус ***партнера НАТО*** з розширеними можливостями.' 'Ми перевели Генштаб на типову структуру держав – членів ***НАТО***.' 'Ми продовжуємо втілення стандартів ***НАТО*** та сумісність наших військ з військами Альянсу.' '…цьогорічний Саміт Україна – ***ЄС*** та спільна заява чи не вперше так яскраво підкреслюють ***партнерство*** України та Європи.' '…поглиблення ***інтеграції*** українських ринків з європейськими.'	9

Volodymir Zelenskiy (2)	Relations, EU, cooperation, assistance, (macro) economic stability 'Фундамент наших **відносин** з **Європейським Союзом** – це спільні цінності, які ми поділяємо та поширюємо: демократія, верховенство права, повага до прав людини, гендерна рівність.' 'Окреслені подальші кроки активної **співпраці** України з **Європейським Союзом**.' 'Вдячний **Євросоюзу** за надзвичайно важливу **допомогу**, надану Україні.' 'Мова й про безпосереднє реагування на пандемію, і про підтримку **макроекономічної стабільності** в нашій країні.' 'Сподіваємося на подальшу тісну **взаємодію з ЄС** у цьому важливому питанні.'	8

Petro Poroshenko (1)	EU, NATO, membership, Euro-Atlantic, integration, partners, security	14
	'…прийняття Верховною Радою мого проекту закону про зміни до Конституції в частині *Європейського Союзу* та *НАТО*, який визначає обов'язковість цього елементу зовнішньої політики держави, як повномасштабне *членство в Європейському Союзі*, повномасштабне *членство в НАТО*.' 'Думаю, що викликом є і спроба спустити на гальмах нашу європейську та *євроатлантичну інтеграцію*.' '…і вже Україна, на жаль, відходить із порядку денного міжнародних організацій і наших *партнерів*.' '…щоб ми прийняли рішення про включення в порядок денний Плану дій щодо *членства в НАТО,* надання нам його – ще раз наголошую, це не просто зобов'язання України, а це зобов'язання Заходу та країн-членів *НАТО* надати нам цей статус після виконання домашньої роботи. ' 'І союзницькі зобов'язання створює не Будапештський меморандум або будь-які інші папірці, а повномасштабне *членство в НАТО*.'	

	'Це не просто відсутність України на самітах *НАТО*, це не просто відсутність кроків по імплементації ПДЧ і закону про національну *безпеку*, який був прийнятий мною, де чітко виписані графіки, що ми маємо зробити для *інтеграції в НАТО*.' 'Бо зараз більше 60% українців.прагнуть *членства України в ЄС та НАТО*.'	
Petro Poroshenko (2)	Partnership, NATO, Euro-Atlantic 'Влада дилетантів заперечувала доцільність та необхідність Плану дій щодо *членства в НАТО*. Тепер вони підтримали цю програмну вимогу «Європейської Солідарності».' 'Ми очікуємо, що Володимир Зеленський доб'ється запрошення на саміт *НАТО*, який відбудеться 14 червня цього року, і переконає його учасників надати Україні План дій щодо *членства*.' 'Неприпустимість будь-якої ревізії конституційно закріпленого європейського та *євроатлантичного* курсу України'.	4

Dmytro Kuleba	East, Ukraine, NATO, partnership, help	7
	'I believe that the current escalation by the Russian Federation in the *east*, demonstrates that *Ukraine and NATO* have to exploit the possibilities, opportunities provided by *EOP* as soon as possible.' 'EOP will *help* to significantly increase interoperability between *Ukrainian* armed forces and defence sector as such, with the defence sector of *NATO*.'	

Table 1.2: Western leaders

Leader's name	Codes presented	Frequency
Angela Merkel	Partner, Ukraine, stability, EU, Ukraine	5
	'…in the energy and transport sectors, German businesses could be competent *partners*.' 'We would like to be a good *partner for Ukraine* on the road to *stability* and economic prosperity.' 'It (the free trade agreement) marks an opening of Ukraine's markets towards the *European Union.*'	

| Jens Stoltenberg | NATO, Ukraine, support, stand with partner, partnership, help, cooperation, Euro-Atlantic.

'***NATO's support for Ukraine's*** sovereignty and territorial integrity is unwavering.'
'***NATO stands with Ukraine.***'
'Allies continue to provide significant practical ***support*** so that ***Ukraine*** can better provide for its own ***security***.'
'***Ukraine's*** new status as an Enhanced Opportunities ***Partner*** demonstrates how both sides benefit from our long-standing ***partnership***.'
'We are ***helping*** to strengthen capabilities, including with training for the ***Ukrainian*** armed forces.'
'We have stepped up our ***cooperation*** in the Black Sea region with more exercises and port visits.'
'And we ***support Ukraine's*** wide-ranging reform agenda, which will make ***Ukraine*** more resilient.'
'And ***help*** advance ***Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic*** aspirations.'
Reforms will bring ***Ukraine*** closer to ***NATO***.'
'We ***help*** them to build their defence and ***security*** institutions, we help them to modernise their armed forces with the reforms and ***NATO*** allies also provide training, ***support*** with training, exercises, participating in joint exercises, and also ***supporting*** in other different ways.' | 28 |

Donald Tusk	Partnership, EU, Ukraine, association, integration, support	12
	'…the strong *partnership* and friendship between the *European Union and Ukraine*.' 'Our *partnership* is built on solid foundations.' 'Our *Association* Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area entered fully into force a year ago.' 'Today we reaffirmed our commitment to advancing the political *association* and *economic integration of Ukraine with the European Union*.' 'The *EU* continues its unwavering *support for Ukraine's* territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence.'	

Valdis Dombrovskis	Support, Ukraine, macro-financial assistance	7
	'We are ***supporting Ukraine*** with a new ***Macro-Financial Assistance*** programme of €1.2 billion.' 'This also shows our continued ***support to Ukraine's*** reform agenda.' 'We will continue our strong engagement to ***support*** the reform orientation and strategic path that ***Ukraine*** has chosen to follow.'	