

Peter W. Schulze,
Winfried Veit (eds.)

*Ukraine in
the crosshairs
of geopolitical
power play*

campus

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Peter W. Schulze (1942–2020) was professor at the Institute of Political Sciences of the Georg August University Göttingen.

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Instead of a Foreword

In memoriam Peter W. Schulze

Winfried Veit

In this place, Prof. Peter W. Schulze should have written a foreword for the third book he was releasing with Campus publishers within the last few years. The first two were published under the titles *Core Europe and Greater Eurasia* and *Multipolarity: The Promise of Disharmony* in 2017 and 2018 respectively. The present book deals with the Ukraine crisis and the deficiencies of European security. Only weeks before its completion, Peter W. Schulze passed away at the age of 77 after a long illness. His commitment to his manifold projects and activities remained nonetheless strong, until literally the last moment.

The titles of the three books are a demonstration of the broad spectrum of Peter's academic and political interests. But that is far from all. During his long academic and professional career, he dealt with many political and geographical issues but always with two main aspects in mind: The construction of a European security architecture and, hand-in-hand with that, the relationship of the European Union with Russia. This did not stem from a purely professional interest; for him, it was a matter of the heart. Given the multiple and profound changes of world order since Peter Schulze started his academic career in the early 1970s, this focus on two of the most fundamental aspects of European policy demonstrates his farsighted view of the world and the role of Europe within it.

After studies in political science at the Free University of Berlin, the London School of Economics and Political Science, and Stanford University, Peter became a research assistant and later an assistant professor in International Relations and Comparative Government at the Free University of Berlin. In 1981, he joined the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) in its international cooperation branch, for which he worked more than twenty years. He started as a research fellow in

its headquarters in Bonn, followed by an assignment at the University of California in Berkeley, where he headed a German-American liaison project focusing on technological and strategic issues. From 1988 to 1992, he acted as director of the FES office in London with an emphasis on German-British relations and European security.

The highlight of his professional career, and at the same time the most challenging part of it, was certainly his assignment in Moscow as head of the FES office in the Russian Federation from 1992 to 2003. In this capacity, Peter not only proved his intellectual, political, and diplomatic skills but became a major mediator of Russian-German relations in the arenas of civil society and academia. He initiated and participated in a number of activities, including the *Schlangenbader Gespräche*, the *Deutsch-Russisches Forum*, and the *Petersburger Dialog*, and he became a trusted interlocutor for both sides.

This was the period when Russia under Boris Yeltsin tumbled towards the abyss and the West misused Russia's weakness to expand further east. Peter Schulze, with his vast experience in international relations and his excellent knowledge of Russia (he spoke Russian fluently), already grasped at that time the danger of this development and he became a tireless and increasingly isolated voice warning against a possible backlash in the relationship between Moscow and the West.

When the backlash happened in the course of the first decade of the 21st century, Peter was already back in Germany after 20 years spent abroad. But it was not his way to retire and spend a quiet life together with his Russian wife Olga, away in his country house in the beautiful landscape of Northern German Wendland. On the contrary: Peter's involvement in academic and political activities became more tireless than ever as he focused on improving European-Russian relations and trying to help with the (re)establishment of a Common European Security Architecture.

Shortly after returning from Moscow in 2003, he became an honorary professor of Political Science at the Georg August University of Göttingen, teaching International Relations and Russian Studies. He also participated in the activities of the 'World Public Forum – Dialogue of Civilizations' and, in 2016, became a co-founder of its successor think tank, the Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute in Berlin.

At the DOC, Peter W. Schulze continued his dedication to strengthening cooperation and dialogue between Russia and the West by leading a project on East-West relations. Even with relations at an all-time low following the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, Peter did not lose hope for their normalisation.

His conviction that conflict-resolution in Eastern Ukraine was key to an inclusive and peaceful European security framework led him to establish a working group on the topic that held a series of meetings between 2017 and 2019. The workshops brought together experts from Russia, Ukraine, Germany, France, the UK, and Austria – including some of the authors of this book – to develop potential solutions and explore flexible rapprochement between the parties to the Normandy Format.

Recommendations emerging from the meetings, held under the Chatham House rule, were informed by principles of mutual understanding, applied to both directly-involved actors and more remote stakeholders, and were shared with policymakers throughout Europe. This book is one of the natural outcomes of Peter's work.

In its obituary, the Institute quotes fellow co-founder Vladimir Yakunin as saying, "Peter Schulze was a true fighter for peace and dialogue", and the DOC says additionally, "Professor Schulze enriched the life of the Institute through his enduring personal commitment. He was a true visionary of peace on the European continent and he tried to shape a lasting peace in Europe for future generations. He was a passionate believer in and supporter of the European Union as the world's most successful peace project since World War Two."

Peter W. Schulze will leave a void, not only as a leading European academic and intellectual but also as a trusted friend and colleague.

Russia and Ukraine

Four scenarios for the future

Andrey Kortunov

Almost seven years have passed since the start of the dramatic events of the Maidan in Kiev, which engendered a profound crisis in Russia's relations with both Ukraine and the West. This is not a short period of time: World War One lasted a little over four years, World War Two dragged on for six years, and only about five years passed between the start of *Perestroika* and the collapse of the USSR. All wars and crises come to an end, and, as a rule, the more acute the crisis, the faster it moves towards some kind of a resolution. It would appear that in seven years, the future of Russia-Ukraine relations should have taken definite shape, just as the future of Ukraine itself should have done too.

Today, however, the situation within and around Ukraine is still, just like seven years ago, characterised by many factors of uncertainty. The *Ukrainian glass* remains either half-full or half-empty. Social and economic reforms in the country are gradually moving forward, but not at a speed that many had hoped for back in early 2014. Ukraine, however, has not become a *failed state*, has not declared a default on its foreign debt, and has not abandoned its course towards a liberal market economy and towards a status as a European political democracy. The Minsk agreements signed in February of 2015 are far from being implemented in full, although all the signatories have repeatedly confirmed their commitments to Minsk. People in Donbas continue to die, but there is no major military escalation in the east of Ukraine: the Donbas militia are not attempting to take Mariupol, and the Armed Forces of Ukraine are not starting a large-scale offensive against Donetsk. Moscow and Kiev have traded harsh political statements and economic sanctions. At the same time, Russia remains one of Ukraine's largest trade partners, and around one million Ukrainians continue to work in Russia. Ukraine is desperately fighting to become fully energy-independent

from Russia. Still, Ukraine's Naftogaz and Russia's Gazprom signed a deal in December 2019 regarding the transit of Russian gas through Ukraine to Europe for the next five years.

In other words, although the current situation between Moscow and Kiev may appear abnormal, fragile, and unsustainable, it nevertheless demonstrates a high level of stability. Consequently, while the current status quo may not suit Ukrainian and Russian societies as a whole, to a certain extent it does at least suit certain influential forces within the political leaderships of the two countries. In other words, the parties see the risks involved in a possible change to the status quo as higher than the risks connected with preserving the present state of affairs. The status quo, as imperfect as it looks, is perceived as affordable—at least for the time being.

In 2019, after the emphatic success of Volodymyr Zelensky in the Ukrainian presidential election in April, followed by another decisive victory of his *Servant of the People* political party at the parliamentary elections in July, it seemed that a breakthrough between Kiev and Moscow became possible. After all, Zelensky always positioned himself as a 'president of peace' in contrast to his predecessor Petro Poroshenko, who ran his unsuccessful re-election campaign as a 'president of war'. The Russian side also sent a positive signal to Kiev by announcing an important personnel change: Vladislav Surkov, who for a long time had held the *Ukrainian portfolio* in the Kremlin and who had been perceived as a committed hardliner, was replaced by Dmitry Kozak—one of the prominent *technocrats* in Vladimir Putin's team and arguably much less hostile to Kiev.

In the summer of 2019, one could conclude that the momentum in Russian-Ukrainian relations started to change. The two sides somewhat moderated their rhetoric toward each other, they were able to achieve progress in the exchanges of detainees, and in de-escalation in Donbas. Finally, after a three-year pause, the *Normandy Four* summit took place in Paris in November of 2019.

Unfortunately, these positive changes have not produced a breakthrough or even steady progress towards a resolution of the crisis. The practical implementation of agreements reached in Paris never got very far, and the next summit meeting scheduled for the spring of 2020 never took place. The Russian side routinely accused Kiev of failing to de-

liver on its commitments made in Paris, while the Ukrainian leadership accused Moscow of inciting authorities in Donetsk and Lugansk to sabotage the ceasefire agreements. In the meantime, the popularity of Volodymyr Zelensky in Ukraine has begun to decline, and his own faction in the Verkhovna Rada started demonstrating less discipline and less loyalty to the presidential administration. On top of that, in early 2020, both Moscow and Kiev had to shift their attention from working on the bilateral agenda to managing domestic problems caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the global economic recession. It would not be an over-exaggeration to state that by the summer of 2020 the state of bilateral relations had reverted to where they had been a year ago.

A question arises: How long can this relative and clearly sub-optimal stability last? In another seven years, will we still be discussing Ukraine's domestic situation and Russia-Ukraine relations using current parameters, noting merely insignificant shifts and delaying the ultimate resolution of the *Ukrainian question* to some indefinite future? Or does the current status quo already contain premises for radical shifts in the coming years, if not months?

Selecting independent variables

Many extremely diverse factors—domestic politics; social, economic, military, strategic, and even psychological factors—affect the state of Russia-Ukraine relations. Some are situational, for instance, the multiple pressures of the global recession on both countries; whereas others are long term, such as the process of shaping Ukraine's civic nation or Russia's political evolution under the renewed constitution. Some can be considered primarily within the bilateral context while others need to be analysed against a pan-European or even global background.

Given the great diversity of these factors, a matrix of possible scenarios of Russia-Ukraine relations may be constructed along two axes. The first axis reflects the possible evolution of Ukrainian society and state: the *weak Ukraine-strong Ukraine* axis; the second reflects the possible evolution of the general international background of bilateral relations: the *Russia-West confrontation-détente* axis.

Both axes of selected independent variables require certain explanations. What is a *strong Ukraine*? I believe it does not necessarily need to be a highly centralised state based on the principles of ethnic nationalism and defining its identity through an opposition to Russia. The *strength* indicator is the capacity of the political elite to conduct a long-term independent foreign policy that reflects a broad public consensus; that is, *strength* is Ukraine's capacity to be not just an object, but a subject in European and global politics. A strong Ukraine is a state with strong institutions rather than strong leaders. Naturally, *strength* entails the implementation of a whole set of socioeconomic and administrative reforms, the improvement of the quality of state governance, the successful fight against corruption, and the further development of civic society.

A *détente* in relations between Russia and the West also needs to be defined. We can hardly imagine Moscow going back to the 1990s model in its interaction with its Western partners. Still less can we see Russia becoming a part of the *consolidated West*. However, even with the *East-West* confrontation generally remaining in place, individual formats of such a confrontation can be very different, from balancing on the verge of a big war in Europe to a particular combination of elements of confrontation and cooperation, as was typical of the 1970s–1980s. By *détente*, we primarily mean stabilised relations, the effective management of elements of confrontation, and the gradual build-up of elements of cooperation. By *confrontation*, we mean sliding down to the model of the start of the Cold War, i. e., to a confrontation without *red lines* that are clearly understood by both parties, without a developed infrastructure of arms control, etc. Of course, the specifics of the general political background will significantly affect relations between Moscow and Kiev.



Figure 1: Four scenarios for Ukraine's future

Status Quo: A weak Ukraine and confrontation

This scenario proceeds from the premise that in the next few years, Ukraine will fail to significantly progress on its path of economic reforms, bolstering government institutions, improving the effectiveness of state governance, and fighting corruption. The split between the authorities and the public will continue, as will the fragmentation of Ukrainian society itself. This does not mean that Ukraine will become a *failed state*: the West will continue to keep the Kiev authorities afloat, providing the necessary minimum of economic and technical cooperation. The questions of Ukraine joining the EU and NATO will, however, be regularly delayed to some ever more distant future, and major Western investment will not come into Ukraine. Under such circumstances, confrontation with Russia will remain the crucial source of legitimacy for any potential Ukrainian leader.

At the same time, this scenario entails the continuation and even intensification of the confrontation between Russia and the West.

The economic sanctions of the United States and the European Union will be retained and expanded. An arms race will start in Europe without any effective measures for confidence-building, and certainly without new treaties on arms control. Russia-NATO interaction will be limited to formal contacts within the NATO-Russia Council, while attempts to vest the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) with additional powers in ensuring European security will prove fruitless. The Minsk agreements will exist on paper only, and no significant progress in their implementation will be achieved.

Given such circumstances, there is reason to predict that the current status quo will remain in effect for a long period of time. Russia-Ukraine relations will remain hostile, despite the fact that neither side is likely to risk escalating the conflict or cutting off trade and economic or diplomatic relations entirely. Both Moscow and Kiev will take a wait and see approach, hoping that, sooner or later, the other side will be forced to make major concessions. Russian and Ukrainian societies will drift further and further apart in terms of culture and civilisation. However, this will not automatically mean that Ukraine will drift closer to Europe. The West will grow progressively more tired of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and even in the context of confrontation with Russia, emphases will shift to other areas such as *meddling* in political processes and attempts to drive a wedge between the European Union and the United States.

A Cold War: A strong Ukraine and confrontation

In the second scenario, Ukraine will succeed in making the highly necessary breakthrough towards economic, social, and political modernisation. Socio-economic stability, transparency, a certainty of the basic rules of the game, and an independent judicial system will engender a significant influx of foreign, primarily Western, investment. The country will go through a significant refurbishment of its political and economic elites, which will become progressively more *European*. Kiev will succeed in overcoming the temptations of political authoritarianism