



EUNPACK

A CONFLICT SENSITIVE UNPACKING OF
THE EU COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH
TO CONFLICT AND CRISES MECHANISM

WORKING PAPER

Implementation of the EU's crisis response in Ukraine

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Contents

- 1. Introduction..... 1**
 - 1.1 Objectives, assumptions and research questions 1
 - 1.2 Building on previous findings 2
 - 1.3 Data collection (methodological notes on in-depth interviews)..... 3
- 2. Implementation of the EU’s crisis response in Ukraine: Policies, practices and perceptions 5**
 - 2.1 Security sector..... 5
 - 2.1.1 EU policies towards Ukraine in the security sector 5
 - 2.1.2 EU officers on the ground: Insights on the intentions vs implementation of the main missions dealing with the security sector 8
 - 2.1.3 Local interlocutors: Reflections on successes and gaps in the security sector 9
 - 2.2 Humanitarian sector..... 15
 - 2.2.1 EU policies towards Ukraine in the humanitarian sector..... 15
 - 2.2.2 EU officers on the ground: The donors’ insights on implementation in the humanitarian sector 16
 - 2.2.3 Local interlocutors’ views on the EU response in the humanitarian sector: Reflections on successes and gaps 18
- 3. Concluding remarks..... 23**
- Bibliography..... 28**
- Appendix 1..... 29**
- Appendix 2..... 32**

List of Tables

- Table 1. Perceived overall effectiveness of the EU’s interventions in security sector reform: Key successes and gaps 14
- Table 2. Perceived effectiveness of the EU’s support to Ukraine in the humanitarian sector: Key successes and gaps 22
- Table A.1 Implementers, beneficiaries and intermediaries: Topics and groups of interviewees 29

1. Introduction

1.1 Objectives, assumptions and research questions

This working paper is a key deliverable in the EUNPACK project, which aims to examine how the EU implements its responses to crises in practice, with specific attention on those factors that constrain implementation of a comprehensive approach. Thus, EUNPACK puts at the centre what the EU *does* and how this fits in with ‘local’ aspirations, ideas and interpretations in conflict-affected areas. Our project therefore goes beyond analysing the EU’s intentions, decisions and stated objectives, instead giving priority to how EU policies materialise on the ground, how they intersect with the policies and politics of other international and local actors, and what the effects and perceptions of the EU’s actions are in crisis-affected areas. As such, the project reflects the current shift in peace and conflict studies away from institutional dynamics and decision-making to how international policies are implemented, contested and modified in local contexts (see e.g. Jarstad and Belloni, 2012). That said, the project addresses the entire scope of EU responses, also exploring its ability to speak with a common voice, and how this affects policy implementation, including possible impediments to efficiency such as different internal motivations and actor constellations, with particular emphasis on the relationship between the EU level and the field level. The latter we see as a crucial factor missing in most analyses.

The objective of this paper is to reflect on the received and perceived EU crisis response in Ukraine, paying specific attention to the security and humanitarian sectors, among the key areas for the EU since the beginning of the crisis/conflict. This research focus is in line with EUNPACK Task 2, aimed at analysing how the EU and its member states are implementing its crisis response on the ground throughout the conflict cycle. Three core assumptions underpin our research focus in this paper.

First, our approach to understanding the EU’s crisis response is linked to a holistic approach to crises, including a long-term perspective and recognition that the EU is only one among various actors influencing the crisis dynamic (Mac Ginty et al. 2016; Richmond et al. 2016). Stemming from that assumption, the analysis takes into account the role(s) of other key international actors assisting in Ukraine (the UN, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), US Agency for International Development (USAID), NATO, etc.) to see where and how EU responses fit into the broader international community’s response. The study also analyses the internal cohesion of responses (by the EU and member states) and assesses whether the EU’s actions are complementary or contradictory with the responses of other international and local actors. Such an intersection helps to identify the dynamics between the EU and its member states, the division of tasks and compatibility of approaches.

Second, we have framed our research bearing in mind a conflict-sensitive approach based on a recognition that efficient conflict interventions should take into account the complexity and multi-layered nature of conflict (with many different perceptions and views about the premises, causes and consequences of the conflict and actions by the local and external parties involved).

Third, we assume that the importance of local crisis ownership and interests should not be underestimated in moving towards more comprehensive approaches to the crisis. This has required dealing with a wide range of local actors either directly engaged with the EU or not engaged for various normative or technical reasons (including both public and private stakeholders).

As the present research is centred on unpacking the intention–implementation gap in the EU’s crisis response in Ukraine as well as identifying the challenges and possible solutions, we analyse the EU’s crisis response from a triangular perspective: seen on paper from Brussels, understood by the EU officers working in Ukraine and perceived by local interlocutors.

The main research questions that we address in this paper are the following ones:

- How have the EU’s responses to and policies on Ukraine been translated or implemented on paper since 2014?
- To what extent does the EU’s crisis response meet the needs of local actors (local ownership)?
- How do the various actors in Ukraine perceive the EU’s role in the crisis?
- Are the EU’s responses seen as legitimate (reputation/image)?
- Given its internal constraints, how can the EU better attune its crisis response to reflect conflict sensitivity and comprehensiveness (lessons learned)?

1.2 Building on previous findings and new survey data

This paper builds on the findings of previous project deliverables, namely a working paper analysing the EU’s approach to the crisis in Ukraine (and Libya) (Ivashchenko-Stadnik et al., 2017a) and a study that assesses how local stakeholders in Ukraine perceive the EU’s approach to crisis management and its commitments to local ownership and conflict sensitivity (Ivashchenko-Stadnik et al., 2017b; Zarembo, 2017). As this paper is concerned with implementation and analyses the EU’s activities from the bottom up, the findings from the perception study are particularly relevant.

In this study we employ a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. The first bulk of data was collected in July 2017 through a quota-based survey in selected locations across Ukraine.¹ The survey showed that the EU remains among the top three most-recognised international actors involved in crisis responses in Ukraine. Among the different instruments deployed by the EU in that framework, respondents were most aware of political/diplomatic activities, development aid and humanitarian assistance. The surveyed awareness and evaluation of the EU’s crisis response in the two selected sectors that constitute the main focus of the current study are worth recapitulating. Notably, although EU support for security sector reform, together with capacity building and the rule of law, ranked among the less well-known and less well-rated aspects, the figures still looked promising: 61.6% of respondents were aware of the reforms and 28.4% were satisfied with them. EU support in the humanitarian sector was among the best-known and best-rated assistance (74.2% and 44.2% respectively) (EUNPACK survey dataset, 2017). Still, for both sectors the levels of satisfaction varied across the groups of beneficiaries (for example, for security sector reform, the polarisation of views was far higher within the group of border guards).

The survey also showed that perceptions about the effectiveness of the EU’s crisis response vary across regions. For nearly half of the respondents, the EU’s presence has had positive effects, while for

¹ Questionnaires were administered via 190 face-to-face and telephone interviews with target groups that included internally displaced people, traders/entrepreneurs, NGO activists, security sector officers, local council representatives and other actors and practitioners who represent categories of actual and/or potential beneficiaries of EU crisis-response instruments, programmes and policies. While more than half of the respondents considered themselves to be professionally involved in crisis response, only a minority said that they personally benefited from EU crisis-response instruments.

a third it has either aggravated or had no effect on the crisis. During the survey interviews, some respondents pointed to the perceived criticalities of the EU's crisis-response endeavours: above all, the EU's actions seem to come 'too little, too late' and relations should be reframed as a partnership rather than assistance.

In Ivashchenko-Stadnik et al. (2017b), proceeding from respondents' inputs, some policy recommendations were formulated:

- 1) The EU's crisis-response actions should take into account regional variations and peculiarities – local counterparts should be targeted through tailored initiatives, distributing projects in a more balanced way across the country.
- 2) The EU should improve its own monitoring mechanisms when allocating funds and better display its commitment as a credible and transparent donor and grant provider – budgetary procedures should be exercised to ensure greater transparency and accountability of all the actors involved.
- 3) The EU's crisis-response actions in Ukraine should offer a long-term strategic vision on issues such as the reintegration and resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the rehabilitation of war veterans.
- 4) More and better organised information is recommended through the establishment of regional EU platforms and resource centres.

1.3 Data collection (methodological notes on in-depth interviews)

The survey was viewed as a series of fresh inputs to be further developed during the next stage of fieldwork with a focus on the two conflict-affected areas (security and humanitarian sectors). A guide for the semi-structured interviews for this specific case (see Appendix 1) was designed to give a flexible yet comprehensive structure for exploring a list of topics and subtopics about interviewees' personal experiences and individual perceptions of the crisis response(s) in Ukraine in five sections:

- the interviewees' background as an implementer (beneficiary or intermediary);
- the context and conflict sensitivity of the programme in relation to the Ukraine crisis;
- evaluation of the management;
- good intentions, mixed results? Views on intentions, implementation and reception of the EU's crisis response in Ukraine; and
- reflections.

During the fieldwork, conducted in late October to mid-December 2017, 43 interviews were carried out, which included 39 face-to-face interviews (32 in Kyiv and 7 in Kharkiv)² and 4 remote interviews conducted via videoconference tools. The interviewees were either Ukrainian citizens or international officials and representatives working for Ukraine-based organisations and missions. They were selected as people who are i) part of the implementation groups, institutions, partners or programmes funded by the EU; ii) direct beneficiaries of the programmes funded by the EU; or iii) experts, journalists, activists and other actors who cooperate with the EU or have knowledge in the areas being investigated (security sector reform and the humanitarian sector).

² We express our deep appreciation to our colleagues, Carolina de Stefano, Aksinya Kurina and Marianna Yeleyko for their assistance in conducting the interviews in Kharkiv and Kyiv.

The average interview duration was 50 minutes. Face-to-face interviews were tape-recorded and summarised in a ‘less-than-verbatim’ resume presented as thematic pieces of main thoughts and ideas. The interviewees’ permissions for using the information from the interviews as general results were recorded at the beginning of each talk (which is why when using quotations in this text, we do not refer to any personal details, such as names or positions). As in the case of the remote interviews, tape recordings were not feasible but transcripts were sent back to the interviewees for confirmation. The interviewees were not requested to disclose their names during the recordings. It was also agreed that personal details from the interviews would be confidential and information would be reported solely as general results. Interviewees often specified which parts of the discussion were ‘on the record’ or ‘off the record’.

The key concern was to engage different segments of local and external stakeholders: government authorities (including members of parliament and heads of ministerial departments or sector-related programmes), civil society (specifically NGOs, volunteers, independent media representatives, opinion leaders and experts), and EU representatives/officials. While gaining access to local actors was a time-consuming but manageable process, reaching EU representatives became the main challenge.³ Failure to obtain more data from the European experts, regardless of the researchers’ struggle to access and engage them, could be explained by several factors. First, EU representatives dealing with the crisis in Ukraine may be under considerable time and workload pressure. Second, EU representatives might be restricted in external communication by certain factors of a security nature. Third, EU representatives may prefer communication in person over an interview conducted via telephone or Skype. These observations highlight the necessity of developing strategies to increase the accessibility and, as a result, the visibility of EU institutions and missions in third countries.

To analyse the rich and extensive texture of the data, the thematic networks technique was applied for systematisation and presentation. Thematic networks seek to facilitate reduction, structuring and depiction of the basic, organising and global themes⁴ around the main research topics. Below we present some results of the analysis, which, being reasonably straightforward, needs further examination and interpretation within the forthcoming EUNPACK academic papers.

³ It is worth mentioning that other research projects seeking to interview EU representatives have faced these barriers to sampling, too. Specifically, the ‘hard-to-reach’ characteristic of EU representatives was underlined during the lecture on “Crisis, conflict and critical diplomacy: Narratives and perceptions of the EU in Ukraine” based on the results of a nine-country research project spanning three years (2015–18) on perceptions and public diplomacy of the EU in the conflicted neighbourhoods (Ukraine, Israel and Palestine) supported by Erasmus+ of the European Commission. The lecture was delivered by Professor Natalia Chaban (University of Canterbury) and Professor Ben O’Loughlin (University of London) of the Fulbright Program in Ukraine and the Kennan Institute (Kyiv Office on 27 November 2017).

⁴ See J. Attride-Stirling, “Thematic networks: An analytic tool for qualitative research”, *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2001, p. 388.

2. Implementation of the EU's crisis response in Ukraine: Policies, practices and perceptions

2.1 Security sector

2.1.1 EU policies towards Ukraine in the security sector

Ukraine has been an active participant in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) since its launch in 2003. From the outset the security dimension has been hailed as one of the ENP's priorities that "contributes to an area of security, prosperity and good neighbourliness".⁵ Moreover, the principles of conflict prevention and good neighbourliness were proclaimed at the core of the ENP.⁶ The principle of good neighbourliness contained in the ENP's founding documents⁷ underpins the objective of settling conflicts between the EU's neighbouring countries.⁸ However, the ENP has failed to reach these objectives. At the time of the ENP's launch, six protracted conflicts persisted within and between the EU's neighbouring countries.⁹ In the meantime, a majority of the ENP countries have plunged into either border conflicts or security crises in the vicinity of the EU's borders. The protracted conflict in the Donbas region represents a major source of instability for the whole Eastern neighbourhood area, weakening the Eastern Partnership security overall.

Despite the EU's ambition to become relevant in security matters in the neighbourhood, its main security tools – the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) – have played a marginal role in the whole ENP area and in Ukraine in particular. The fact that less than a third of the EU's CSDP missions abroad have been deployed in the neighbourhood region illustrates this. Only five neighbours have benefitted from this support,¹⁰ a relatively low number given the priority that the EU gives to its neighbours on other issues.

⁵ See Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, "Neighbourhood at the Crossroads: Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2013", JOIN/2014/012 final, Brussels, 2013.

⁶ See also Art. 8(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which stipulates that the EU "shall develop a special relationship with neighbouring countries, aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterised by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation".

⁷ For detailed discussion, see R. Petrov, "Conflict Prevention and Good Neighbourliness in the European Neighbourhood Policy", in D. Kochenov and E. Basheska (eds), *Good Neighbourly Relations in the European Legal Context*, Leiden: Brill Nijhoff, 2015.

⁸ Some association agreements – especially between the EU and its eastern neighbours – give a prominent place (among the essential elements) to the principle of good neighbourliness. For example, Art. 2 of the EU–Ukraine, the EU–Georgia and the EU–Moldova Association Agreements provide that "[p]romotion of respect for the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, inviolability of borders and independence, as well as countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, related materials and their means of delivery also constitute essential elements of this Agreement".

⁹ These include Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgia), Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan and Armenia), Palestine–Israel, Transnistria (Moldova) and Western Sahara (Morocco).

¹⁰ The following CSDP missions have been deployed in the European neighbourhood since 2003: Libya (one military mission and three border control missions), Palestinian territories (one border control mission and one police mission), Georgia (two civil/rule of law missions), Moldova–Ukraine (a hybrid mission), and Ukraine (one advisory mission for civilian security sector reform).

Furthermore, these divisions can be seen in the ongoing Ukraine crisis. Therein the EU's role is significant but not leading. In the nutshell, the EU's reaction to the Ukrainian crisis involves increasing aid flows to Ukraine; symbolically joining the Trilateral Contact Group for resolution of the Ukraine–Russia crisis (involving OSCE, Russia, Ukraine and representatives of the so-called ‘peoples’ republics’ in Donbas); establishing the EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) in Ukraine with a relatively narrow advisory mandate; and adopting several rounds of political and economic sanctions against Russia and individuals who have undermined Ukraine's territorial sovereignty and integrity.

EU restrictive measures and sanctions remain the most significant instrument, putting pressure on Russia to stop violating Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. In the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea, EU member states agreed to apply Art. 215 TFEU. In March 2014, EU leaders decided to suspend bilateral talks with the Russian Federation on visa matters and on a new agreement, and considered the possible implementation of additional measures, such as travel bans, asset freezes and cancellation of the EU–Russia summit, in the event of Russia taking further steps to destabilise the situation in Ukraine. A first set of individual restrictive measures was introduced (targeting “certain persons responsible for actions which undermine or threaten the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine” through travel bans and asset freezes),¹¹ to be possibly complemented by targeted measures vis-à-vis Russia as well as economic, trade and financial restrictions regarding Crimea. EU leaders decided to extend the scope of sanctions against Russia after the security situation in Ukraine drastically deteriorated by the end of summer in 2014. A shockwave was then triggered by Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 being shot down above the part of eastern Ukraine controlled by pro-Russian ‘separatists’ – an incident that caused the loss of 298 lives and pointed to further destabilisation in the European neighbourhood and within the EU itself. In July 2014, EU leaders not only agreed on a new set of restrictive measures, renewing those against specific individuals or entities, but also suspended the signature of new financing operations in Russia by the European Investment Bank.

Direct diplomatic engagement of the EU in solving the Ukrainian crisis (the annexation of Crimea and military aggression in eastern Ukraine by the Russian Federation) has been limited so far. The EU took active part in negotiating the Geneva Joint Statement of 17 April 2014. However, EU institutions did not take part in the Minsk meetings; rather, they welcomed the ceasefires brokered in Minsk in September 2014 and in February 2015. Nevertheless, the EU has been clear about the fact that the duration of EU economic and political sanctions against the Russian Federation is linked to the *complete implementation of the Minsk agreements* by Moscow. Furthermore, the EU initiated and conducted trilateral talks with Ukraine and Russia on trade issues related to the launch of the EU–

¹¹ See Council Regulation (EU) No. 269/2014 of 17 March 2014 concerning restrictive measures in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine (OJ L 78, 17.3.2014) amended by Council Regulation (EU) No. 476/2014 of 12 May 2014 (OJ L 137), Council Regulation (EU) No. 783/2014 of 18 July 2014 (OJ L 214/2), Council Regulations (EU) No. 810/2014 and No. 811/2014 of 25 July 2014 (OJ L 221), Council Regulation (EU) No. 959/2014 of 8 September 2014 (OJ L 271), Council Implementing Regulation (EU) No. 961/2014 of 12 May 2014 (OJ L 271/8). See also Council Decision 2014/145/CFSP of 17 March 2014 concerning restrictive measures in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine (OJ L 78, 17.3.2014) amended by Council Decision 2014/265/CFSP (OJ L 137, 12.5.2014); Council Decision 2014/119/CFSP of 5 March 2014 concerning restrictive measures directed against certain persons, entities and bodies in view of the situation in Ukraine (OJ L 66, 6.3.2014). See Council Regulation (EU) No. 883/2014 of 31 July 2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine (OJ L 229, 31.7.2014), amended by Council Regulation (EU) No. 960/2014 of 8 September 2014 (OJ L 271).

Ukraine deep and comprehensive free trade area in 2015. In addition, the EU has been an active supporter of continual work towards a political solution of the Ukrainian crisis through discussions in the so-called 'Normandy format' (with France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia) and the Trilateral Contact Group (OSCE, Ukraine and Russia). At the time of writing, the EU remains the biggest financial contributor to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine – that is, the mission that monitors the implementation of the Minsk agreements in eastern Ukraine.¹²

After the start of the crisis in Ukraine in November 2013, the **EU set up two permanent missions in Ukraine**, which contribute to the enhancement of the security and crisis management and extend the mandate of one previously established mission. First, the **EUAM for Civilian Security Sector Reform** provides financial, technical and expert support for Ukrainian law enforcement and rule of law institutions and agencies (the Ministry of Internal Affairs, National Anti-Corruption Bureau, National Police, Security Service of Ukraine, Border Guard Service, judiciary and others).¹³ Second, the **Support Group for Ukraine** pursues the objective to support the effective implementation and application of the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement by the Ukrainian government. For this purpose the Support Group for Ukraine offers expert assistance in critical areas of reform (economic and fiscal reforms, agriculture, energy and the environment, financial cooperation, justice and home affairs (including anti-corruption), policy coordination, science, education and social matters) and helps to coordinate financial assistance to Ukraine on behalf of international financial institutions.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the EU continues to support the **EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM)**, which has been operating since 2005. EUBAM is the EU's advisory and technical assistance mission based in Odessa to promote cross-border cooperation and oversight, regional security and economic cooperation along the Ukraine–Moldova border around the Transnistrian conflict area. The EUBAM mandate has already been extended five times (in 2007, 2009, 2011, 2015 and 2017).¹⁵ Although the establishment of EUBAM was not linked to the conflict in Ukraine, it represents a kind of 'success story' in the EU's engagement in cross-border conflict areas and is frequently recalled by our interviewees as a frame for a possible future EU mission in eastern Ukraine. As noted in the interviews, not all of the mentioned missions are perceived as active players in implementation of sector-specific reforms in Ukraine. This can be partly explained by the fact that not all of the missions prioritise the security sector within their wide spectrum of activities in Ukraine. Moreover, EU and local perceptions of mission mandates might vary, too.

¹² The EU accounts for two-thirds of both the mission's budget and monitors. In addition to its member states, the EU has contributed through the Stability and Peace Instrument €33 million to support the mission's capacity to fulfil its mandate. The EU has furthermore donated 40 unarmoured and 44 armoured vehicles, 35 trauma kits and provided training. See "EU–Ukraine Relations", Factsheet, EEAS, 15.11.2017 (https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/4081/%20EU-Ukraine%20relations,%20factsheet).

¹³ For more information on the EUAM, see <http://www.euam-ukraine.eu/>.

¹⁴ For more information on the Support Group for Ukraine, see https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/countries/ukraine/sgua_en. It should be mentioned, however, that while dealing with some aspects of security sector reform (such as anti-corruption and the rule of law), the Support Group for Ukraine focuses mainly on fundamental and systematic governance and economic reforms. Therefore, as noted in the sections based on the interviews, the Support Group for Ukraine has not been widely discussed in the specific talks about the sector.

¹⁵ For more information on EUBAM, see <http://eubam.org/who-we-are/>.

2.1.2 EU officers on the ground: Insights on the intentions vs implementation of the main missions dealing with the security sector¹⁶

As the interviews with the EU representatives working in Ukraine show, the conflict in Ukraine has represented an unprecedented challenge for the EU, in spite of its experience with dispatching and supporting missions outside its borders. As seen by EU officials, there have been three common problems for all EU activities and missions in Ukraine that undermine its efficiency during the crisis: i) a slow workflow that involves complicated bureaucratic procedures;¹⁷ ii) an identity crisis, as the local partners do not entirely share the goals and agendas of EU missions in Ukraine; and iii) doubts of the local population over EU neutrality and goodwill (notably, the potential of EU-led reforms and the Association Agreement to improve people's lives is disputed at times).

With respect to the task-specific missions, EUAM and EUBAM have been the two main initiatives directly dealing with the security sector, albeit in different ways and for different periods.

As the part played by EUAM in the EU's response to what happened in 2014 is limited to reform of the civilian security sector, it should be underlined that the mission is not involved in the military aspects of security reform (something that prompts concern by the local public, as revealed in the reflections of the Ukrainian partners). One of EUAM's most considerable contributions is support for the implementation of reforms in Ukraine through the delivery of hands-on advice and training (specifically, training events and liaison with local counterparts take place in Kyiv and through its regional presence respectively in Lviv and in Kharkiv, where a number of EU officers are permanently deployed). EUAM supports the idea that the best ways to deal with a short-term crisis is to focus on long-term, sustainable economic development and democracy building and to ensure that reform efforts are coordinated with the Ukrainian and international actors. Thus far, reform in areas such as anti-corruption and the rule of law are central to that, and that is how EUAM is contributing. The gap between intentions and implementation occurs because the effectiveness of the activities on the ground largely depends on how the Ukrainian counterparts implement the strategic advice from EUAM; this is one of the most stubborn sectors to change, chiefly owing to its high level of corruption – vested interests slow progress down.¹⁸

As mentioned above, unlike EUAM, which was established in the aftermath of the crisis, EUBAM is a long-established initiative¹⁹ that has been affected by the recent conflict in Ukraine in three

¹⁶ In this section we refer to the interviews held with the representative of the Reporting and Evaluation Department at EUBAM Ukraine on 28 November 2017 and with the representative of the Public Information Department of EUAM Ukraine on 30 November 2017.

¹⁷ For example, there are some paradoxical aspects of security protocol that do not allow EU officers to travel to some places.

¹⁸ A scaled-up fight against corruption remains a top priority of the Support Group for Ukraine (see the interview with Peter Wagner, Head of the Support Group for Ukraine (which was not discussed by our informants but was still on the agenda), at <http://en.interfax.com.ua/news/interview/439894.html>).

¹⁹ Compared with the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, EUBAM is more a technical project, which does not depend on the CSDP and which has reportedly enjoyed a remarkable degree of autonomy and flexibility, having adapted to a changing context since 2005 – although this situation changed in 2015. Until then, the mission action plans were generally drawn after several rounds of consultations with local partner services. The latter are continually informed through several reporting activities (the exchange of news and views between EUBAM officials and the Ukrainian local counterparts/institutions) including i) monthly general activity reports (dispatched to the member states' embassies in Ukraine and Moldova), the EEAS, the Commission, the EU Delegations in Ukraine and Moldova, and the local partners' services, namely national custom and border services as well as the two ministries of foreign affairs; ii) a Common Border Security Assessment Report (also

ways. For a start, in the short term, in 2014–15 EUBAM local partners – namely Ukrainian border guards – were involved in the fighting in Donbas. They suffered several casualties and reorganised their work in the other border regions according to staff rotation (therefore, EUBAM activities were affected by the discontinuity of contacts and operations). Also, Odessa has started to be considered a very vulnerable location because of the Russian troops stationed in Transnistria; the borders were thus militarised (e.g. with fortifications) and this circumstance was definitely not in line with the EU's border concept. In addition, in the medium term, the Border Guard Service was reclassified as a military institution (before 2014–15, it was a law enforcement agency), and the enthusiasm of local partner services for reform seemed to be reduced (even if the EU had requested its transformation into a civilian agency). Third, over time a policy shift in how Ukraine sees Transnistria has occurred. Before the crisis, there were areas of connivance and tolerance vis-à-vis semi-legal trade (Ukrainian border and customs officials have often turned a blind eye). Since the crisis, Ukrainian institutions have enacted a clear anti-separatist stance and this has resulted in more restrictions on trade and travel across the borders by Transnistrian residents. Furthermore, since 2014 EUBAM's role has increased, especially in relation to specific tasks that have become crucial, such as monitoring whether border checks are done in compliance with human rights standards and legally.

EUBAM reaches out to local communities, notably to schools and universities, local town halls and business associations (through the organisation of Trade Facilitation Working Groups).²⁰ In the case of business associations, it has been pointed out that the exchanges between EUBAM and local counterparts involve not only representatives of the private sector but also representatives of the public sector, such as the Ministry of Finance.

In line with the role of EUBAM, assessment of it is generally positive as the mission revolves around technical assistance and is issue-specific. However, EUBAM rarely captures the attention of the general public, as its activities are often considered of little interest to average Ukrainian citizens.

2.1.3 Local interlocutors: Reflections on successes and gaps in the security sector²¹

Applying the same research questions, we received divergent thematic views from EU officials and local interlocutors: while the first group of interviewees provided very concise, focused and professional insights on the technical issues of the EU missions' activities, the second group touched upon a broad range of conflict-derived topics, extending beyond the issues of security sector reform and the role of EU missions in the conflict response in Ukraine in their comments. We can identify

monthly), with a focus on cross-border crime (dispatched to all the actors listed above plus local security services and police); and iii) reports on Transnistrian economic trends.

²⁰ Trade Facilitation Working Groups aim to counteract smuggling (of weapons and cigarettes/tobacco), infringements of intellectual property rights and customs fraud.

²¹ In this section we refer to interviews with members of the Ukrainian parliament, officers of the Border Service of Ukraine, representatives of the National Guard Academy, representatives of the Civil–Military Cooperation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (CIMIC), leaders of the NGOs dealing with the security sector (Foundation 101, Association of Ukrainian Human Rights Monitors on Law Enforcement, Independent Defence Anti-Corruption Committee, Police Under Control Monitor and the Ukrainian Freedom Fund) and representatives of the non-EU international partners (OSCE monitoring mission, USAID and Transparency International). In addition, the interviewees included journalists who worked in the non-government controlled areas, on the contact line and in the east (*Hromadske TV*, the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine and *Ukrayinska Pravda*) as well as political and military experts with relevant experience in the field (Team Europe, Institute of World Policy and the National Defence Academy).

several reasons for that. It is worth noting that several interviewees directly dealing with security sector reform have been involved in a variety of different programmes being implemented in cooperation with the EU as well as international organisations; consequently, not all the comments shed light on the EU's crisis interventions. Also, the backgrounds of the implementing parties as well as their understanding of the security issues and applicable solutions vary. These gaps in understanding are worth special attention.

First, it should be underlined that since the conflict in 2014 there has been some initial mismatching of the actual mandates of the EU missions and the local partners' expectations (as Ukraine repeatedly asked for a monitoring mission in Crimea and in Donbas but got advisory missions based in Kyiv instead). The reason for that was an objection on the part of some EU member states to the idea of sending the missions to the conflict zones (Zarembo, 2017; EUNPACK interviews in 2017). Second, there has been some divergence in the EU and local understandings of the security sector as such. While the EU understands the security sector as law enforcement agencies to ensure the rule of law, in Ukraine, as stated in the "Concept for Development of Security and Defence Sector of Ukraine", it excludes prosecuting and fiscal components while including defence.²² As a result of focusing on a wider security context, the expectations of the EU missions and initiatives within the context of the Ukrainian security sector became higher than what is mainstreamed within the core mandates.

In most interviews, the often heard statement "yes, they do a lot but they could have done more"²³ does not refer to more generous financial aid from the EU; on the contrary, it is always about a more proper allocation of funds and efforts ("they provide crutches, but don't treat the fracture",²⁴ or "the EU deals with the consequences, not the causes").²⁵ Thus, one of the overarching topics that we arrived at through interviews with the local interlocutors could be defined as the lack of strategic efforts (diplomatic and political) to lead the process aimed at restoring the territorial integrity of Ukraine and strengthening its geopolitical security²⁶ as an associated member of the European Community (presumed under the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement). It is stressed that during a continuing conflict no reforms can be fully effective, as instability makes it impossible to set reliable criteria for their success.

²² The "Concept for Development of the Security and Defence Sector of Ukraine" was formalised by the Edict of the President of Ukraine (No. 92/2016), on 14 March 2016 (<http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/922016-19832>).

²³ Interviews with Ukrainian political actors and stakeholders, Kyiv, November 2017.

²⁴ Interview with a member of parliament, Kyiv, 17 November 2017.

²⁵ Interviews with Ukrainian political actors and stakeholders, Kyiv, November and December 2017.

²⁶ As the military expert we interviewed said,

it is alarming that Ukraine's NATO partnership status is lower now than it was under President Kuchma in 2008. Turkey has become a member of NATO regardless of its readiness. It just was defined as timely. The Ukrainian army cannot become strong enough to confront the emerging threats and challenges from the eastern neighbour. If it's a military solution, we are not ready for that. Yet, this option is not on the table for Ukraine. That means that Ukraine's integrity is not among the top priorities. ... We all have different aims. On the national level territorial integrity and security is a priority. If an EU member state would have lost 20% of its territory, the EU would have a different vision of the conflict.

Interview with a military expert and ex-UN peacekeeper, Kyiv, 29 November 2017.

In line with this overarching view of the security issues, it was also underlined by our interviewees that “the Ukrainian conflict is a new type of conflict for the EU. No one was ready to react.”²⁷ Furthermore,

[p]robably, it is also an institutional shift [from Catherine Ashton to Federica Mogherini as High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy] that hampered prompt reply. But in any case, starting from spring 2014 the EU has started to react in some way. Apparently, Angela Merkel is the one who has made enormous efforts in improving the situation.²⁸

Different perceptions of Ukraine's conflict by the locals and the Europeans seem apparent to most interlocutors. As stated in the interviews,

although Ukraine is closer to Europe, the EU is more concerned about Libya and Syria because they see refugees in their cities.²⁹

They do not play the first violin in conflict response in Ukraine although it is a conflict in Europe.³⁰

Europe needs peace, security and restoration of economic ties with Russia by all means.³¹

The EU is too complex to have a common vision of the events. But there are corporate interests, and they are strong.³²

The issue of conflict and context sensitivity is an indispensable part of the interviewees' discussions about the EU's role in security developments in Ukraine. Most local interviewees pointed out that it took the EU a very long time to understand that it is an inter-state conflict and involves external aggression.³³ Finally, now this understanding is supported in both rhetoric and actions. While the EU was often accused by the local actors of appeasing the aggressor³⁴ at the beginning of the conflict, EU sanctions have at last been applied in a straightforward way “against Russia, not against Russia and Ukraine, and not against Ukraine and other actors” (meaning that the sanctions signify the EU's understanding of the main driving forces of the conflict). “Some declarations made by members of the European Parliament disappoint the audience in Ukraine, but in general the sanctions have been in action since mid-2014.”³⁵ Some experts rate “the EU as the second, if not the first, most active international actor dealing with the conflict in Ukraine (together with the US)”³⁶ and “one of the few partners who help with security sector reform (along with the UN, American funds, separate embassies' support and some other occasional partners)”³⁷ They state that OSCE has a supportive function in dealing with the conflict (it is based on the border to monitor the situation but has no

²⁷ Interviews with Ukrainian political actors and stakeholders, Kyiv, 17 and 21 November and 4 December 2017.

²⁸ Interview with a representative of the leading Ukrainian think tank focusing on Ukraine–EU relations, Kyiv, 4 December 2017 and a Ukrainian political and financial analyst, Kyiv, 24 November 2017.

²⁹ Interview with a Ukrainian military expert, Kyiv, 27 November 2017.

³⁰ Interview with a member of parliament, Kyiv, 17 November 2017.

³¹ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 28 November 2017.

³² Interview with a Ukrainian military expert, Kyiv, 27 November 2017.

³³ Interviews with Ukrainian political actors, stakeholders and experts, Kyiv, November and December 2017.

³⁴ EUNPACK survey data, July 2017.

³⁵ Interview with a representative of the leading Ukrainian think tank focusing on Ukraine–EU relations, Kyiv, 4 December 2017.

³⁶ Interviews with Ukrainian stakeholders and political experts, Kyiv, November 2017.

³⁷ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 30 November 2017.

influence on the conflict developments). The Minsk agreements are a policy document, and the EU plays an important role in preserving it. Yet, it is clear to many of our interviewees that, “if the US stops sanctions, the EU sanctions fade away the next day”³⁸ (that is why these two actors, the US and the EU, are important together). Yet, “the leading role in development of [the] conflict belongs to Russia. If Russia is no [longer] interested in the conflict, it will stop. The US and EU are the allies of Ukraine, and this is an important factor for us.”³⁹

Many experts underlined that the EU is a “rigid bureaucratic structure, which is probably good for stable countries and their union”.⁴⁰ The problem arises when such structures try to respond to a crisis, which is something very volatile and hardly predictable; to react effectively one needs to be fast.⁴¹ Sometimes the EU takes time to discuss and approve “yesterday’s decisions or initiatives”.⁴² One of the examples given was the implementation of the twinning project with the National Police of Ukraine, which started before the conflict to improve recruitment and law enforcement, but which was unable to respond to the new security challenges (the French Ministry of Interior was the main counterpart).⁴³

Yet the local stakeholders we interviewed pointed out that the rise in crime has mainly been a repercussion of the war (this includes illegal arms trafficking, crimes against property and other types of organised crime). As the “conviction rate is rather low, the police and Prosecutor General’s Office are generally perceived as the enemy, not a partner”⁴⁴ (low and ever-decreasing trust in law enforcement agencies has been confirmed by national surveys).⁴⁵ Consequently, the focus on the reforms, training of police officers (who work in residential districts), inspectors and detectives has been an important task. The aim is to make the process less complicated by dividing non-serious and serious crimes. This activity is supported by EUAM, which is perceived as “helpful in developing the long-term strategies”.⁴⁶

Still, the perceived risks and pitfalls of the implementation process are rather challenging. Apart from the difficulties on the ground (such as a lack of human and technical resources), the security sector in Ukraine has traditionally been one of the most suspect, used by the Ukrainian elite as both a source of unprecedented corruption and a bargaining chip in the political struggle.⁴⁷ In most interviews it was put frankly that the authorities manipulate and “sabotage real changes”, which is why only

³⁸ Interview with a Ukrainian political expert, Kyiv, 4 December 2017.

³⁹ Interviews with Ukrainian political and military experts, Kyiv, November and December 2017.

⁴⁰ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, 28 November 2017.

⁴¹ Interviews with Ukrainian stakeholders and political experts, Kyiv, November 2017.

⁴² Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 30 November 2017.

⁴³ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 28 November 2017.

⁴⁴ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 30 November 2017.

⁴⁵ See Institute of Sociology, *Level of trust in Ukrainian society: The Dynamic of Social Changes*, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv, 2015, p. 552. It is worth mentioning that the level of trust in the Ukrainian army is quite high (it is ranked among the three most trusted actors, together with the church and volunteer NGOs).

⁴⁶ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 30 November 2017.

⁴⁷ The ‘Peoples’ Front’ bloc (with former Prime Minister Arseni Yatsenyuk as leader), an influential member of the governmental coalition and a key player in the Ukrainian parliament, controls all the security forces (excluding the army). It is observed that “they reject or accept some reforms in exchange for their interests in the play with the Petro Poroshenko block”. Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 30 November 2017.

commitments, and not promises, of the Ukrainian leadership should be supported by the donors.⁴⁸ The launch of the e-declaration system,⁴⁹ although welcomed by the international partners as an effort of transparency concerning civil servants' earnings and property, needs to demonstrate its effectiveness in the long term to increase citizens' trust towards the public sector and institutions, while the scandals that have reportedly plagued the National Anti-Corruption Bureau are hindering the reform process.⁵⁰

According to several interviewees, even though there have been some positive examples of cooperation with the EU in the field of security sector reform, these have been weakened by a lack of consistency in the reform path and the slowness of launching and managing the projects. Furthermore, another source of disappointment is the poor level of interest demonstrated by EU decision-makers vis-à-vis those issues that are not considered "urgent" or "pressing" in European capitals, yet are still of utmost importance in countries such as Ukraine.⁵¹ The template for local needs assessments is thus ill-designed.⁵²

Many local interlocutors spoke of a risk of EU fatigue over the issue of Ukraine's conflict and its uneasy approach to reforms (which are in fact "caused by the corrupted political elite, not the country as such").⁵³ Unfortunately, smooth and friendly diplomatic tools do not prove effective with the Ukrainian leadership, and badly serve the process of reform. More support should be given to civil society bodies that monitor the authorities on the ground. The authorities desperately need more oversight. When supporting a project in the non-governmental sector, the EU calls for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to have links among the authorities, which leads to the engagement of loyal NGOs rather than independent actors. As an example, the EU supports the 'public councils'⁵⁴ in the ministries. As one of our interviewees argued, the problem with the councils, specifically with the council in the Ministry of Interior, is that they replicate informal networks of loyalties that might hinder the reforms towards transparency and accountability of institutions: "Obviously, it is not their task to change the system however wrong it is, and they will never invite partners who are going to criticise their activities and raise concerns about the real problems in the security sector."⁵⁵

As many local experts underlined, for future developments in the security sector, disappointment with the EU might have disastrous consequences in Ukraine. The better the EU's image

⁴⁸ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 28 November 2017.

⁴⁹ The e-declaration system is an instrument launched by the National Agency on Corruption Prevention for publicly disclosing officials' income and assets and making officials' declared gains open to public scrutiny. It includes online tools for analysing declarations, monitoring the lifestyles of senior officials, and conducting training on e-declarations.

⁵⁰ See for example M. Romanenko, "Scandal Casts Light on Corruption in Ukrainian Corruption Prevention Agency, *Hromadske*, 16 November 2017; see also O. Sukhov, "Scandal plagues agency to prevent corruption", *Kyiv Post*, 17 November 2017.

⁵¹ Interview with a Ukrainian military expert, Kyiv, 27 November 2017.

⁵² Interview with a representative of Donetsk CIMIC, Kyiv, 24 November 2017 and other local stakeholders, Kyiv and Kharkiv, October and November 2017.

⁵³ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, 28 November 2017.

⁵⁴ Public councils consist of representatives of the NGOs, trade unions, media, etc., and are created within the ministries in line with the Decree on facilitation of civil society participation in the implementation of public policy, adopted in 2010 and amended in 2015 (<http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/996-2010-%D0%BF>).

⁵⁵ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 28 November 2017.

is in Ukraine, the better is the communication, particularly at the horizontal level of civil society and communities, and the better it is for the complex reforms and for the geopolitical aspirations of Ukraine. “The EU should look attractive to Ukraine. We need for the European dream to move ahead. So, the EU should remain the best version of itself.”⁵⁶

Apart from discussing the underlying theme (“no reforms can be successful during the warfare” and “the EU should strive to deal with the causes, not the consequences”),⁵⁷ the local partners gave some valuable insights on implementation of security sector reform viewed in the context of different counterparts’ needs (specifically, the Border Guard Service, the National Police and the State Penitentiary Service).⁵⁸ These will be discussed in the thematic EUNPACK papers and academic articles. Table 1 gives an overview of the key issues identified by the local actors as successes and gaps in security sector reform.

Table 1. Perceived overall effectiveness of the EU’s interventions in security sector reform: Key successes and gaps

Successes	Gaps
EUAM participation in legislative developments, specifically technical support for the adoption and implementation of the National Defence Law (bringing to the fore the issue of accountability of the defence sector, which is new and timely for Ukraine)	Over-bureaucratized procedures, slow decision-making, complicated security protocols that make prompt crisis-response impossible
	No EU mandate to deal with the military sector reforms
	No attuned standards to be applied to border management in the east
The first phase of reform of the National Police (although finally, it did not succeed due to problems with the inventory/re-evaluation) *	Not always well-qualified (low familiarity with local specifics) but overpaid staff (a rather urgent problem observed both among the EU representatives and local experts the EU hires in Ukraine) **
Decentralisation of the Prosecutor General’s Office and the successful first stage of judicial reform in Ukraine via conducting the first round of the selection of judges for the Supreme Court of Ukraine (although now little progress is being made)	Local ownership is equated mainly with the government, which remains the EU missions’ main direct counterpart
	Lack of political will to support local projects to control weapons and fight their illegal circulation (in line with Art. 12 of the Association Agreement)
Successful <i>inter-state</i> initiatives in the defence sector (for example, the Polish–Lithuanian–Ukrainian Brigade)	Neglected reported violations of human rights (such as unlawful detention, use of torture and ill-treatment not only by the police but also by the Security Service in Ukraine)
The EU’s anti-corruption strategic initiatives, finally applied at the highest level (yet the results are to be seen)	Wishful thinking, which is used to justify the missions’ outcomes in Brussels; connected to this, poor accountability of the EU missions in Ukraine; lack of a reliable assessment mechanism
	Lack of easily accessible information about the security sector reforms; related to this, rare information about the activities and inputs of the EU in Ukraine

⁵⁶ Interview with a Ukrainian political expert, Kyiv, 4 December 2017.

⁵⁷ Interviews with members of parliament, Kyiv, 17 November and 4 December 2017.

⁵⁸ Interviews with Ukrainian stakeholders, Kyiv and Kharkiv, October and November 2017.

	Lack of regional initiatives (most EU experts work in Kyiv) and poor reach of the EU missions from their Kyiv seat to the regions
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Notes:

* Nearly 80% of the old staff (particularly in the drug squad and the department of criminal investigations as crucial detachments) have kept their positions. The same processes have been observed in the patrol service: bright people who were hired at the beginning sought to change the corrupt system, but the system has moved them out instead. The old staff have largely returned, and real changes have never happened.

** Lack of understanding and lack of motivation to understand the local context and sector-specific problems are widespread (interviews with a member of parliament, Kyiv, 17 November; interviews with Ukrainian stakeholders, Kyiv and Kharkiv, October and November 2017).

Source: Authors' compilation based on the interviews with local interlocutors, Kyiv and Kharkiv, October, November and December, 2017.

2.2 Humanitarian sector

2.2.1 EU policies towards Ukraine in the humanitarian sector

The EU is one of the largest humanitarian aid providers in the world. The European Commission is responsible for providing and coordinating humanitarian aid with an annual budget of about €1 billion to over 110 countries. The European Commission's Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Operations (DG ECHO)⁵⁹ is responsible for the provision of humanitarian aid on behalf of the EU. Ukraine is one of the priority countries of DG ECHO's activities, and the EU remains the largest humanitarian aid donor in Ukraine, dealing with the consequences of the conflict between Ukraine and Russian-backed forces in Donbas – that is, reportedly 35,000 conflict-related casualties (approximately 11,000 deaths caused in combat and by firepower) and some 2 million IDPs and refugees from eastern Ukraine.⁶⁰ The EU's humanitarian aid to Ukraine is provided not only via DG ECHO but also EU-funded NGOs and UN organisations. The EU targets the provision of humanitarian assistance at about 4 million people in eastern Ukraine. Since 2014, the EU and its member states have offered over €526 million in humanitarian and early recovery aid to Ukraine through EU-funded projects in food assistance, shelter, water, health (including psychosocial assistance), education in emergencies, and essential household and livelihood aid.⁶¹

As vulnerable groups are the focus of EU support, it is worth mentioning that DG ECHO targets not just Ukrainian nationals who are internally displaced, but also Ukrainian nationals residing in the non-governmental controlled area (NGCA). Since 2014, DG ECHO has provided €88.1 million in emergency assistance to this area.⁶² The EU's humanitarian assistance also reaches Ukrainian refugees in Belarus and Russia, and targets early recovery and peacebuilding operations (small repair works, social and economic integration of IDPs within their new host communities in Ukraine, demining and psychosocial support, and women's support in order to increase their participation in conflict

⁵⁹ For more information, see http://ec.europa.eu/echo/index_en.

⁶⁰ Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine of 15 November 2017", Geneva (http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/UAReport20th_EN.pdf).

⁶¹ More information is available at https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/4081/%20EU-Ukraine%20relations,%20factsheet.

⁶² For more information, see <http://ec.europa.eu/echo/node/2978>.

resolution and community security).⁶³ DG ECHO staff members are the only personnel authorised to travel across the conflict line.

In 2014, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) established the Emergency and Stabilization Unit supported by the EU. The unit provides humanitarian assistance and stabilisation support to conflict-affected people throughout the country. The IOM in Ukraine largely deals with humanitarian responses, specifically with countering human trafficking, social assistance to IDPs and returnees. In November 2014, the IOM signed two contracts with the EU, respectively funded by the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace and DG ECHO, whose regional office is hosted by the Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine (this issue will be given specific attention in the next section).

*2.2.2 EU officers on the ground: The donors' insights on implementation in the humanitarian sector*⁶⁴

In the wake of the humanitarian challenges of Ukraine's crisis, the EU's missions and projects in Ukraine have suffered an increased level of internal doubt and contestation in publicly recognising the real nature of the conflict. The hesitation of the member states in admitting that it is not a civil war but rather aggression by another country has resulted in the deployment of strategies and missions that do not respond to what Ukrainians asked for (this is also confirmed by the local interlocutors' narratives: "Many EU representatives arrive in Ukraine being predetermined to deal with civil conflict here; consequently, some of them have either wrong or biased perceptions of the differences between people in the east and the host population in other regions, and it badly serves the communication process." Most of the EU's initiatives in the humanitarian sector are built around relief provision to the displaced people and, recently, around the issues of reconstruction and reintegration, especially in the health and education sectors. Still, the politics of information during the conflict, the dilemmas of naming the conflict and identifying its driving forces remain crucial for both local and international actors.

Focusing on the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the priorities mentioned during the interviews with EU officers, the two contracts signed in November 2014 between the IOM and the EU are worth special attention. The first one included different projects:

- 1) support for livelihoods (backing micro-businesses initiated by IDPs, start-up grants, capacity-building and vocational training);
- 2) a social cohesion component, involving the local 'houses of culture' and engaging with minorities (and on gender, ethnicity, etc.);⁶⁵
- 3) support of border guard activities and deployment of IOM officials to checkpoints (dealing with thousands of people crossing the demarcation line daily); and

⁶³ More information is available at https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine_en/1937/Ukraine%20and%20the%20EU.

⁶⁴ In this section we refer to the interviews with the representatives of the Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine, 19 December 2017 and the stabilisation programme coordinator, IOM, Mission in Ukraine, 20 December 2017.

⁶⁵ These projects are identified and proposed by local community 'initiative groups', mixing IDPs and host community representatives. That second component of activities includes the provision of direct cash payments to vulnerable families and disabled people to meet their urgent needs in the Kharkiv region, which was chosen for the project because it borders on Donbas and hosts about a quarter of the total Ukrainian IDP population.

- 4) support for the Donbas SOS!, one of the leading Ukrainian NGOs dealing with IDPs.

The EU also funds the National Monitoring System, which involves quarterly surveys conducted by the IOM. The IOM has been conducting surveys on the situation of IDPs in Ukraine on a regular basis since March 2016. The National Monitoring System draws on the IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix approach and aims to support the government of Ukraine in collecting and analysing information on the socioeconomic characteristics of IDP households, the movements and locations, numbers, vulnerabilities and needs of displaced populations in Ukraine. EU-funded projects carried out by the IOM are decided and designed through bilateral negotiations between the two organisations.

As our interviewees argued, even though the EU is committed to supporting the IOM's projects in the country, there are some shortcuts coming from the fact that both local authorities and international actors seem to prioritise the military and security dimensions of the conflict rather than the humanitarian one. Furthermore, the nexus between humanitarian issues and long-term structural development is critical and should be better understood and fulfilled by the Ukrainian authorities. However, one of our interviewees emphasised that the EU is the only donor in the NGCA and is to be praised for its actions in Ukraine, even though the usual limitations of procedural slowness, tardiness and the complex bureaucratic dynamics persist.

One shared belief seems to be that 'much work has to be done'. In that respect, DG ECHO's Humanitarian Implementation Plan (2018) has acknowledged the complex humanitarian context within which assistance should be provided – with 3.4 million people in need, in both the government-controlled area and the NGCA; 1.6 million IDPs and several hundred thousand refugees in neighbouring countries; 600,000 people along the contact line (5km on both sides) suffering lack of protection, with risks to freedom of movement, shrinking humanitarian space, and critical water and electricity supply infrastructure.⁶⁶ The DG ECHO strategy will be to prioritise lifesaving activities, the most urgent needs and most vulnerable people. The first priority now is the NGCA and contact line on both sides. Due attention should be given to advocacy, respect of international humanitarian law and the centrality of protection, as well as enhanced humanitarian access and space. In addition are effective coordination, solid and evidence-based needs analysis and vulnerability mapping, support for the humanitarian/development nexus (the Joint Humanitarian–Development Framework) and cost-efficiency. These rather urgent aspects of humanitarian work have been actively discussed by the local interlocutors too.

⁶⁶ DG ECHO, Humanitarian Implementation Plan 2018, presented at the Partners' Meeting on 19 December, Brussels; 20 December, Kyiv.

2.2.3 Local interlocutors' views on the EU response in the humanitarian sector: Reflections on successes and gaps⁶⁷

Unlike security sector reform, which remains a relatively 'locked topic' for the wider public,⁶⁸ a range of humanitarian challenges brought about by the conflict have become issues of growing concern, covered in the media and discussed in professional and private talks. The recent release of a group of Ukrainian hostages in late December 2017, which was the result of the largest exchange of the detained since the military aggression in Donbas,⁶⁹ updated the complex humanitarian agenda of the conflict, which is now the longest-running one in Europe since World War II.⁷⁰ As the interviews demonstrated, most local interlocutors give humanitarian issues a multifaceted wide-angle look. First, unlike EU officials who did not discuss any Crimea-related problems during our talks, the local interlocutors gave equal importance to the emergencies of the annexed peninsula and the breakaway territories in the east. Second, in the local talks, discussions on recent developments in the humanitarian sector sometimes went far beyond the EU missions and the mandates of EU-supported projects (the EU corporate codes of ethics and protocols followed by the European interlocutors, who concentrated on the implementation of the EU mandate throughout the interviews, are fully understood, though). Third, just as discussed in the previous section, the focal point around which the discussions revolved was defined as "the lack of a complex approach in dealing with the problem", a "late response" and "focusing rather on consequences than on the causes of the conflict".⁷¹

It is worth underlining that in most humanitarian emergency situations the international missions and NGOs are established in response to the experience or direct involvement in specific conflicts (for example, Save the Children emerged during World War I to assist people in Germany and Austria–Hungary, and Médecins Sans Frontières was set up in response to the experiences of French doctors during the Nigerian civil war). Ukraine's conflict is a new type of external conflict that has been observed in Europe from a distance, through media and analytic centres' reports. That is why the role of secondary data in defining the emergency situations by the donors in Ukraine has been huge (an issue that deserves separate analysis). This factor explains possible divergences of views among the local actors, being inside the conflict, and international experts, observing it from the outside, on a

⁶⁷ In this section we refer to the interviews with the members of parliament, human rights defenders (including the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, Crimean Human Rights Group, Eastern Human Rights Group, Kharkiv Human Rights Group), representatives of the CIMIC, leaders of the NGOs and projects dealing with the displaced people and other conflict-affected groups (IDPs Hub, Kharkiv Station, Vostok-SOS, Studena NGO, Right for Defense, Ukrainian NGO Forum, Observatory for Democracy and the ULEAD project), representatives of the non-EU international partners (OSCE monitoring mission and USAID), information agencies and unions (*Internews* and National Journalist Council of Ukraine), independent journalists who worked in the NGCA, on the contact line and in the eastern regional and other local experts with relevant experience in the field.

⁶⁸ That is because of security reasons, although these are sometimes overused by the authorities and their fully controlled or 'friendly' media groups, and because the wide audience – outside sector-specific actors and observers – seems disinterested in the agenda.

⁶⁹ Although the representatives of the Normandy contact group were present during the exchange, it is widely emphasised by local experts that the prisoner swap was facilitated by the Russian authorities in line with President Vladimir Putin's election campaign. See *Korrespondent news*, 17 November 2017 (<https://korrespondent.net/ukraine/3907490-bolshoi-obmen-pochemu-putyn-vdruh-reshyl-pomoch>).

⁷⁰ See "Ukraine and separatists begin largest prisoner exchange of conflict", *The Guardian*, 27 December 2017 (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/27/ukraine-and-separatists-begin-largest-prisoner-exchange-of-conflict>).

⁷¹ Interviews with Ukrainian stakeholders, Kyiv and Kharkiv, October and November 2017.

range of humanitarian issues that should or should not be covered by international humanitarian assistance. “They should have put more effort into stopping the conflict, but they ask us to negotiate with armed groups and offer food and clothes instead” is a somewhat typical claim about the humanitarian missions during conflicts in Europe,⁷² and is what we have heard from some of our local interviewees in Ukraine.⁷³ As one of the interlocutors put it, “the main focus of the EU is pure humanitarian aid and support for reforms but it is definitely not a proper conflict response”.⁷⁴ “The conflict resolution is left to the mercy of other formats, such as the Normandy group.” Most local actors claim that the donors’ response to the immediate humanitarian problem, specifically the emergence of IDPs, was rather late (“a lot was done by the local partners before the donors became concerned”). At the same time, humanitarian assistance initiated and supported through multilateral agencies by individual governments or the EU has drawn appreciation, as expressed by many local actors.

Some of the topics raised during the interviews deserve special attention. Let us summarise the three main themes from the narratives below, highlighting the thorniest issues that require further fine-tuning by the EU of the conflict response in the humanitarian sector.

Neglected violations of international human rights

It is emphasised that “war always brings a wide range of problems in the humanitarian sector, and the rise of intolerance and violation of international human rights, particularly of prisoners, are observed on both sides of the conflict”.⁷⁵ The EU has done a lot to facilitate implementation of European standards of human rights in Ukraine, and apparently, legislation and law enforcement practices are changing due to the EU’s initiatives; support in this field can hardly be underestimated. Still, the EU’s reaction to the violations of international law and aggression by the Russian Federation in Crimea and Donbas remains weak. As stated in one of the interviews, the “territorial integrity of one the largest countries in Europe has not been restored for a long time. This entails bad consequences for international security.”⁷⁶ Moreover, the Minsk agreements have led to a frozen conflict and created the conditions for hostage-taking (as political and humanitarian issues are dealt with in one document). It is an “abrupt violation of the Geneva Convention”.⁷⁷

Not directly related to the current conflict but also important in the context of international human rights, double standards are observed in asylum policies. As Ukraine is a transit country, potential asylum seekers enter Ukraine on the way to Europe. It is reported that there is a gap between what the EU recommends to the Ukrainian migration institutions, and what it tells human rights defenders (“in fact, the EU is interested in not allowing potential asylum seekers and refugees into Ukraine”).⁷⁸ The EU’s enforcement of discriminatory practices on the border leads to violation of the conventional commitments.

⁷² See K. Watkins, *The Oxfam Poverty Report*, Oxfam, Oxford, 1995.

⁷³ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 30 November 2017.

⁷⁴ Interview with a Ukrainian international journalist with experience of work in war zones, Kyiv, 16 November 2017.

⁷⁵ Interview with a Ukrainian human rights defender, Kyiv, 1 December 2017.

⁷⁶ Interview with a Ukrainian human rights defender, Kyiv, 28 November 2017; interviews with Ukrainian political actors and political experts, Kyiv, November and December 2017.

⁷⁷ Interview with a Ukrainian human rights defender, Kyiv, 28 November 2017.

⁷⁸ Interviews with human rights defenders, Kyiv, 23 and 28 November 2017.

Crimes against journalists, widespread during the conflict, is yet another urgent issue. It is underlined that the EU has good experience in following high standards in human rights and, specifically, the rights of journalists. “The Ukrainian authorities should be responsible for all cases of crimes (unfortunately, now impunity is widespread).”⁷⁹ In addition, the “Prosecutor General’s Office refuses to provide information on the crimes against journalists to the media but they usually have to speak up when the information is requested from Strasbourg.”⁸⁰ Critical changes can be initiated through establishing international offices (of the Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters without Borders or the European Federation of Journalists) for monitoring the media and the defence of journalists in Ukraine (as is done in Bangladesh, Mexico, etc.). The EU might be able to support such initiatives.

The case of Crimea: Making it part of the story

In December 2016, the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court defined Crimea as a zone of international armed conflict. Nevertheless, local interlocutors have doubts as to the consistency of the EU’s position towards the annexed peninsula as “the EU insists on dividing the two issues, Donbas and Crimea” and omitting “the Crimean case from the current discussions”.⁸¹ Notably, the American partners have a different position (Donbas and Crimea are reported as one case of aggression, and this is stressed by the US Embassy in Ukraine during public talks), while the “EU is more flexible and ready to negotiate”.⁸² However, as one of the interviewees put it “the EU does not accept annexation, and it’s a positive sign”.⁸³

Yet, non-recognition and lack of focus leads to neglect of the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Crimea.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, the Minsk process does not specifically consider the case of Crimean prisoners. This issue requires urgent attention by the international partners.

The Crimean Human Rights Group pays attention to violations of the two UN covenants, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Geneva and Rome Conventions. The Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights Nils Muižnieks visited Crimea in 2014 and published a

⁷⁹ Interview with a Ukrainian media expert and head of a journalist union, Kyiv, 2 December 2017.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Interviews with Ukrainian human rights defenders, political experts and Crimean activists, November and December 2017.

⁸² Interviews with a Ukrainian political actor, Kyiv, 17 December 2017 and a Crimean NGO leader and human rights defender, Kyiv, 29 November 2017.

⁸³ In July 2017 the Crimean Human Rights Group met with Hugues Mingarelli, Head of the EU Delegation to Ukraine, and presented their report. They have the impression that the head of the EU Mission in Ukraine “has good knowledge of the situation”. The Crimean Human Rights Group cooperates with the European External Action Service on sanctions as they collect information about the organisers of annexation. They think this is the only mechanism of pressure on Russia, but they do not know if their info is being used. They will be in touch with the EU partners regarding this issue. Interview with a Ukrainian human rights defender, 30 November 2017.

⁸⁴ There have been two categories of prisoners in Crimea: criminal prisoners and political prisoners. Overall more than 2,000 prisoners have been forcibly moved from Crimea to the Russian Federation. The number of political prisoners from Crimea is about 60 people. Most of them are taken to very distant prisons, including those in Siberia (to take a person out of the network). The cases of Oleh Sentsov (sentenced for 20 years), Oleksandr Kolchenko (sentenced for 10 years), Andrii Kolomiets (also sentenced for 10 years), Oleksandr Kostenko and Volodymyr Balukh (both sentenced for almost 4 years), all based on false evidence, are just a few from a long list of profound violations of human rights in Crimea. See the “Crimean Human Rights Situation Review” by the Crimean Human Rights Group, December 2017 (https://crimeahrg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Crimean-Human-Rights-Group_Dec_2017_ENG.pdf).

detailed report, but since then the Russian Federation has prohibited his entry to Crimea and to Russia. At present, international human rights defenders are not allowed to visit Crimea. The local human rights defenders expect that the EU should work on a possibility of being present in Crimea (if they apply for entry permission to Russia and depict the ad hoc circumstances in the reports, it will not mean that they accept annexation). The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission should be present there, too. Human rights defence is an apolitical mission. Violation of human rights, war crimes and crimes against humanity should be the three main directions of human rights monitoring.⁸⁵

It is highlighted that the EU should get a proper understanding of the complexity of the Crimean issue and avoid politicisation of the defence of human rights. The issue of ethnic discrimination is gaining attention, as Crimean Tatars have members in the parliament of Ukraine and they also attend meetings in Brussels. However, it is crucial that all vulnerable groups are supported (LGBT groups, religious groups, political prisoners of different nationalities, etc.). To gather a clear understanding of the situation on the ground, the EU should develop a pool of partners they work with. "Monopolisation will not serve the process."⁸⁶

It is suggested that a human rights platform should be launched in the EU to defend people (to avoid immediate constraints, discussion on the territory should be excluded from the agenda). In March 2017, the Crimean Human Rights Group discussed this issue in Brussels. First and most importantly, this platform should facilitate oversight of the trials in Russia and, possibly, in Crimea (when the two authoritarian leaders, Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, agreed to set some selected prisoners free, it is a dangerous practice). Such an international platform can help a lot in defending those who have been unjustly accused, convicted in Crimea and forcibly moved to be sentenced in Russia.⁸⁷

Defining the vulnerable

Focused research is required to define the most vulnerable groups during the conflict in Ukraine, particularly as emergencies develop unevenly across the territories and categories of the displaced. As we see it now, the definitions are based on the existing template. As an electronic unified database on IDPs is still under development, needs are not assessed adequately. Local partners underlined that the vulnerable groups are always part of the EU's programmes;⁸⁸ however, most international programmes ask local partners to make a list of priority groups to address. In turn, they follow the standard scheme and send requests to the local social welfare office. In Ukraine, vulnerable groups are strictly defined as families with many children, single parents, disabled and retired people. Some local private funds, such as that of Renat Akhmetov (a steel tycoon in Ukraine), also support women above the age of 55, regardless of their status. As a result, these categories are sometimes over-supported. As one of the interviewees put it, "after three years of receiving humanitarian support, the local population in the east got accustomed to such a practice: they became less active as they know that the support will be in place. It is not a good solution for a population of working age."⁸⁹ Yet, families with one child and two young unemployed parents or a single woman aged 50 with no job, no shelter

⁸⁵ Interview with a Ukrainian human rights defender, 30 November 2017.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Interviews with Ukrainian human rights defenders, Kharkiv and Kyiv, October, November and December 2017.

⁸⁹ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 28 November 2017.

or relatives to support her, and ineligible to receive humanitarian aid, can be even more vulnerable. That is why creating jobs will be a more durable solution. There have been some projects to support entrepreneurs but they are not well distributed and not targeted at the eastern border zone. It is also noted that families with many children are sometimes in a worse position than retired people. Children should be supported by educational programmes, not gifts.

Discussion of the priority groups for help go beyond humanitarian aid, sometimes overlapping with the other fields, such as border zone management. Foundation 101, the local NGO in charge of human rights monitoring at the checkpoints and supported by a range of international partners, watches the standards for all of the population (such as proper control procedures, availability of drinking water, etc.) but concentrates on vulnerable groups. Specifically, they initiated new requirements for dealing with particular groups at the checkpoints (these include disabled individuals, people with young children and so on). New rules have finally been adopted by officials, making this one of the positive examples of cooperation between civil society, donors and authorities.⁹⁰

At the same time, while the population in the east seems to be overwhelmed by different humanitarian aid projects, other vulnerable groups affected by the conflict (such as displaced people in other regions) are often ignored by the donors. Another problem is associated with the war veterans returning from the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) zone (as of August 2017, 306,199 people had the status of ATO veterans).⁹¹ Although several local NGOs provide rehabilitation and integration programmes, a few international donors are ready to support such initiatives.⁹² EU expertise and good practices in dealing with young veterans can be adopted in Ukraine. As suggested by the interlocutors for the overall international approach to people in need in Ukraine, “a shift from humanitarian aid to development aid should take place”.⁹³

Apart from the need to elaborate a common thematic agenda and agree on definitions, the local partners call for more efficient management practices of the donors. This issue, together with local ownership, reputational and informational challenges, set a common background for the EU’s intentions and implementation consistency (in both the humanitarian and security sectors – see appendix 2). Major successes and gaps in the EU’s crisis response in the humanitarian sector are highlighted in Table 2.

Table 2. Perceived effectiveness of the EU’s support to Ukraine in the humanitarian sector: Key successes and gaps

Successes	Gaps
The EU is a key contributor of humanitarian aid in the conflict area in eastern Ukraine (with a distinct	The main emphasis is on dealing with the consequences and not the causes of the humanitarian emergency

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Data from the State Service for War and ATO veterans, August 2017.

⁹² Interview with a Ukrainian NGO leader, Kyiv, 28 November 2017.

⁹³ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 16 November 2017. As also noted in the bulk of other interviews, there is no ‘humanitarian emergency’ anymore, as was the case in 2014 and 2015. Three years after the beginning of the crisis, IDPs are now looking for the best conditions for living permanently in the cities to which they escaped. Interviews with Ukrainian stakeholders and NGO representatives dealing with IDPs, Kharkiv and Kyiv, October, November and December 2017.

role of some member states, such as Germany, Sweden, Poland and the Netherlands)	Lack of fast and easily applicable templates to work with during emergencies (and as a result, late responses to urgent needs)
Slow but consistent development of cooperation with a range of civil society actors to deal with IDPs in the east	EU representatives are not present in Crimea; human rights monitoring is required in all the occupied territories
Good practices in cooperating with the local NGOs and authorities in increasing standards of humanitarian assistance in the east	Lack of EU visibility; * lack of an information strategy to disseminate information on success stories
Effective EU cooperation with other international agencies to trace the dynamic of the humanitarian situation (the National Monitoring System in conjunction with the IOM)	EU humanitarian assistance is focused mainly on IDPs in the east (although IDPs and other conflict-driven vulnerable groups require support in other regions too)
The EU has a good reputation in facilitating long-term reconciliation and peacekeeping projects (with schools on dialogue in Norway and Croatia)	Consistent EU humanitarian aid to a targeted group of people diminishes their life motivation; the EU's humanitarian aid should not only be aimed at relief but also at development needs (education, especially language courses, employment, etc.)

Note:

* As discussed during the Cafe Debate meeting in Kharkiv on 20 October 2017, owing to the more aggressive public relations and media campaign via the Russian-sponsored media, humanitarian aid provided by the Russian government in the occupied territories is more visible than international and EU assistance. The EU must enhance its public relations and media tools in Russian and Ukrainian in order to promote its objectives and results in the east.

Source: Authors' compilation based on the interviews with local interlocutors, Kyiv and Kharkiv, October, November and December 2017.

3. Concluding remarks

The ties between Ukraine and the EU, put at stake during the turbulent events of November 2013, have also been put to the test during the subsequent phase of the hybrid conflict (2014 to date). Ukraine has embarked upon the ambitious process of implementing the new generation of association agreements the EU offered to its eastern neighbouring countries. Together with Georgia and Moldova, Ukraine has chosen to take the path of European integration and share common EU values at the expense of severing economic ties with the Eurasian Economic Union and plunging into security calamities, which led to the violation of its territorial sovereignty and a soaring number of victims (Petrov and Van Elsuwege, 2014, p. 8). Although Ukraine was and remains one of the key countries of the ENP and the central pillar of the Eastern Partnership (Schumacher et al., 2017, p. 40), and in spite of the fact that the EU is perceived, both locally and internationally, as one of the leading players in solving the Ukrainian crisis, a range of internal and external problems hamper durable solutions.

Being fully aware of the emerging risks of the Ukrainian crisis, the EU has unleashed its full arsenal of available security and assistance tools to stop a further escalation of the conflict within Ukraine and beyond its borders. Hitherto, the EU had succeeded in launching two ad hoc missions in Ukraine (the Support Group for Ukraine and EUAM) and in reinvigorating the existing border mission (EUBAM). Furthermore, the EU has initiated a wide range of political, economic and security sanctions (restrictive measures) against Russia and individuals involved in supporting the annexation of Crimea and the breakaway Donbas areas. In the domain of humanitarian aid, the EU has proved to be one of

the leading actors by providing assistance to displaced and war-affected people in Ukraine, in the NGCA and abroad.

The objective of our study has been to look at the intention–implementation gap of the EU’s crisis response in Ukraine from a three-fold perspective: on paper, as seen by EU officials and perceived by local actors. Empirical research conducted within the EUNPACK project in 2017 brings the following observations.

First, there is a growing gap between the bold intentions of the EU to contribute to a solution of the Ukrainian crisis and to prevent its further escalation within the domain of the EU’s close neighbourhood (in the opinion of one interviewee, “the crisis we observe in Ukraine is more a crisis of the European security system than the crisis in one selected country”).⁹⁴ However, it is evident that at least the former objective has hardly been achieved. The Russian government does not recognise itself as a party to the conflict and publically condemns both EU and international sanctions. As the conflict unfolds, our research demonstrates that the EU’s security policy objectives and results fail to achieve the appreciation of Ukrainian nationals too. Most of the interviewees indicated that the EU’s role as a security provider and global player within the context of the Ukrainian conflict has been significantly overestimated (local experts characterise the EU’s crisis response as “too little, too late, quite often misguided”).⁹⁵ Losing hope for a sustainable security solution, local belief in the EU’s capability as a security provider has weakened (“Europe needs peace, security” and “restoration of economic ties with Russia by all means”).⁹⁶

Nevertheless, the overall picture is not completely grim. Generally, the EU is seen as a reputable international actor that, with the support of other global players (such as the US and international agencies), considerably contributes to the further containment of the conflict. The EU has quite solid ideological foundations for its crisis-response actions in Ukraine, since the EU is keen to protect and to promote common European values, which remain a target for the Ukrainian development project. Through its projects and missions in Ukraine, the EU has managed to initiate the first phase of key reforms in the country (such as the introduction of a new National Police and selection of the new cohort of judges of the Supreme Court). Undoubtedly, these cases represent the success stories of the EU’s contribution to the modernisation of Ukraine. Still, our interviewees also call for the EU to pay more attention to gathering a deeper understanding of the Ukrainian problems on the ground, to facilitating better mechanisms for implementing the complex reforms and to evaluating the consistent and long-term outcomes. In the security sector, anti-corruption interventions and systemic, durable solutions (such as the creation of the National Anti-Corruption Court) have been the most urgent needs. In the humanitarian sector, the creation of an international platform for monitoring human rights in the occupied territories and border zones is the most pressing task to protect people who need help most.

During the first year of the turbulence, the dilemma of recognising the nature of the conflict in Ukraine (military aggression by an external player versus a civil conflict) hampered the EU’s conflict-response efficiency. Since then, the EU has done a lot to reconsider its attitude. Although Crimea is still depicted as part of the Russian Federation on many maps that are occasionally printed in the member

⁹⁴ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder and political expert, Kyiv, 30 November 2017.

⁹⁵ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 23 November 2017.

⁹⁶ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 28 November 2017 and an interview with a Ukrainian political and economic expert, Kyiv, 24 November 2017.

states, the EU's non-recognition of the annexation remains unchanged, which is perceived as a positive sign in Ukraine. At the same time, the EU still refrains from dealing with the Donbas and Crimean cases as similar instances of aggression and from expanding the mandate of its representatives in the two border zones. This leads to perceptions of the EU's efforts by the local partners as avoidance of a proper conflict response.

Better coordination between the key donors, between the EU and local counterparts, between Brussels and EU officers based in Ukraine, and between the Kyiv-based and regional representatives is also required to compensate for the 'lost time and money'. It is underlined that short-term expert assistance and training have quite limited effectiveness in a complicated local environment. Local authorities (especially in the conflict areas) suffer from a lack of qualified human resources, lack of transparency and lack of independent media in the regions. As a result, relevant EU assistance cannot reach all the target areas. Our interviewees call upon the EU to be more frank and open with the Ukrainian authorities and to demand deeper and faster reforms conditional on further EU assistance. "[T]he EU as a donor has become a hostage of the recipient: after having spent so much money and effort here, the donor cannot admit the effort was not successful. The EU needs success stories."⁹⁷

All of the above brings us to the conclusion that the EU's response to the crisis must not be solely tailor-made but also take into account certain macro-level issues, like the EU's capabilities to meet various security challenges in the world and the EU's ability to apply its strategic vision of its external policies towards the resolution of specific conflicts and crises.

Among the possible solutions to attune the EU's conflict response in Ukraine, several valuable suggestions have been made by the local political actors, stakeholders and experts we interviewed.⁹⁸

First, the EU can enhance the information and coordination of the EU member states in the domain of the EU's conflict response in Ukraine. Second, it should adopt planning practices to avoid double-funding, which is widespread now given that there is no overall coordination of projects. One voice and one set of actions should be a priority (for instance, two round-tables on IDP rights on the same day at the same venue but on different flows and supported by different European partners is not a sad joke, but a reality). Third, the EU should put more effort into building up horizontal ties (as mentioned in one interview, "European bureaucrats are very skilful in managing projects but they cannot communicate with the local leaders, heads of enterprises, etc., who can do a lot in the humanitarian field if they are properly involved").⁹⁹ The EU can also do more to involve its civil society in helping Ukraine. The horizontal ties can have great impact (business-to-business, media-to-media, science-to-science contacts, etc.). There are many people-to-people initiatives supported by individual European states: it is a horizontal niche with an emphasis on dialogue and mediation. This mainstream line should be widely supported by the EU. Dialogue and social cooperation should become a priority at the international, national and local levels.¹⁰⁰ Fourth, the national and regional levels should receive separate attention (as many real problems are left behind, specifically in the humanitarian sector, such

⁹⁷ Interview with a Ukrainian lawyer, human rights defender and EU stakeholder, Kyiv, 17 November 2017.

⁹⁸ This summarises the comments of the local interviewees in Kharkiv and Kyiv, October, November and December 2017.

⁹⁹ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, 24 November 2017.

¹⁰⁰ In the east, the current representatives of the quasi-republics do not represent the local population, they are chosen by the Russian Federation to play their roles in the external scenario; the reliable and trusted international partners need to contact locals and develop horizontal ties to involve all groups in the discussions on peacekeeping and post-war development of the east.

as the lack of data on homeless children and lack of expertise in setting up a system of support for families). This will entail a different logic for the project work.

One of the key problems that the EU can assist with is the creation of jobs in Ukraine. Here it is crucial to build up sustainable institutions, not projects. As one example, Ukraine has only one or two regional business schools. During 26 years of Ukrainian independence, it has not managed to set up a network of schools to prepare highly skilled managers. As a result, the provinces do not have staff able to fill out application forms in English (this is not because these people are badly educated, but rather they are educated along old outdated standards; moreover, former Soviet ‘Komsomol’ (Communist Union of the Youth) members cannot build an efficient economy). The EU can create a powerful success story in Ukraine if it applies the same strategy here as it applied in Poland: in 1992 the College of Europe was set up in Warsaw, long before Poland’s EU membership. Now, there are two main places where European bureaucrats are prepared: in Bruges and Warsaw. That is a crucial element of dealing with institutions and sustainability. One of the main expectations is that the EU will be able to explain to European elites the need to support Ukraine as an indispensable part of Europe.

Another challenging issue is the EU’s work with local NGOs. Civil society cannot rely on donors alone – it should also rely on citizens. Yet the role of European partners is that of referees in civil society communication with the government: the position of the EU institutions and the Council of Europe is perceived as influential, and receives attention. It is both pressing and motivating. The main objective here is Ukraine’s integration into the European space (not necessarily through membership).

More pressure is needed on the central authorities in Ukraine to follow European standards in legislation and practices. More publicity and visibility are needed (all initiatives should be widely discussed in the media to make the process more transparent). The routine diplomatic behaviour badly serves the relationships with the Ukrainian authorities. Sometimes it is worth taking a more demanding approach. Specifically, when plans and commitments are ignored, when freedoms are violated, when members of the coalition use hate speech in their official declarations, such actions should be stopped. Pressure and conflicts should not have a place in the rhetoric of the Ukrainian state authorities. Such officials should not be offered hands during meetings, they should be treated as “political savages”.¹⁰¹

The historical role of the EU can hardly be underestimated – “it can prevent Ukraine from becoming a totalitarian state”.¹⁰² The Eastern Partnership should be used for appropriation of European standards in legislation and practices. Double standards should not become common place in Ukrainian politics (currently, the situation is alarming).¹⁰³

To conclude, the EU’s role in turning Ukraine from a conflict spot to a success story (and, possibly the most successful EU project of the new century) is a mission that can reinforce the European project. In Ukraine, the EU is widely perceived as an actor with expertise in post-conflict solutions and sustainable development. The EU’s ability to facilitate a balanced agenda makes it the most reliable

¹⁰¹ Interview with a Ukrainian media expert, Kyiv, 2 December 2017. As stated in one of the interviews, as they feel no punishment, as they feel influential, particularly self-confident after their meetings with the EU high representatives, they continue to behave in such a manner; ... [f]irst and foremost the task is to dismiss those who abuse power, who are involved in corruption. Sanctions should be applied (for example, accounts seized, business activities banned). At the moment the anti-corruption rhetoric of the EU is rather ornamental.

¹⁰² Interview with a Ukrainian media expert, Kyiv, 2 December 2017.

¹⁰³ Interview with Ukrainian stakeholders, lawyers and human rights defenders, Kyiv, November and December 2017.

partner of Ukraine today. The EU's reputation in Ukraine should be used to speak about the reintegration of Donbas and about complex post-war processes in Ukraine. A more proactive approach by the EU in solving the conflict in Ukraine can facilitate good intentions leading to good results.

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Appendix 1

EUNPACK In-Depth Interview Guide

Table A.1 Implementers, beneficiaries and intermediaries: Topics and groups of interviewees*

Topics	Groups
1) Security Sector Reform/Border Management	A. Interviewees who have been part of the implementation groups/institutions/partners/programmes funded by the EU
2) Humanitarian Action/Internally Displaced People (IDPs)	B. Beneficiaries of the programmes funded by the EU
	C. Experts, journalists, activists, and other actors who cooperate with the EU or are knowledgeable about the targeted topics 1 and 2

* NB: Please note that we focus on the two topics and three groups below.

- NB: Before starting the interview, ask the informant's permission to record it. Upon agreement, please start recording with a short introduction: "Today is October (date, time). We meet with ____ (first name) at ____ (place). We agree that the information from the interview is confidential. No personal information will be shared with anyone, and we have your permission to record and analyse your responses at the conclusion of this study. We also confirm that your responses will be reported as general results only. Let's start."
- Please note that interviewees are not obliged to disclose their full names but are welcome to introduce themselves if they want to. You can use only first names during the interview.
- Please make notes at the time you start/end each interview and your impressions during the interview, if any.

1. First section: The informant's background as an implementer (beneficiary or intermediary)

Start by asking: *At the beginning I would like to ask you about your involvement in the crisis-response actions in Ukraine supported by the EU. Would you please tell me about the programme itself and your role in it?*

- What is the programme, when was it launched and since when have you been involved?
- Speaking of the project team, who are the professionals involved, within and outside Ukraine, in the actual realisation and execution of a project or activity?
- How is the workflow organised (structure, resources, reporting process, etc.)?

2. Second section: Context and conflict sensitivity of the programme in relation to Ukraine's crisis

Start by asking: *The programme you enrolled in has been active from... (before 2014 or since 2014). In your view, what are the main crisis time problems in the field you're dealing with? Is the programme targeted to handle the consequences of the crisis in any way?*

Elaborate on the topic by focusing on the research questions below. ... Please strive to ask open questions as much as possible.

- Let's talk about the issues/problems that the EU initiatives deal with. How and by whom have those issues been formulated? Is there an acceptable balance of EU and local priorities?
- Stemming from your experience, are EU crisis-response objectives realistic, given the context?
- How does it address the needs of vulnerable groups (women, minorities, migrants, youth and children)?
- How does it take into account local perceptions? *(NB: We want to know if it risks feeding, rather than preventing, tensions, cleavages and animosities.)*
- Can you tell me more about the tactics of local actors in providing a proper understanding of the local issues to the EU? Do you think the EU's crisis response serves their needs? *(NB: We want to understand if there is any mismatch between the local and the EU's understanding of security, crisis or threat.)*

3. Third section: Evaluation of the management

Start by asking: *From your point of view, if we evaluate the efficiency of the programme looking at its different elements, what are the most- and the least-elaborated aspects of its management? Then elaborate using the questions below.*

*Is the programme **comprehensive** in dealing with different aspects of the crisis and involving different relevant actors?*

- Does the EU's crisis response consider all the different dimensions of security (food, human, etc.)?
- Does civil–military cooperation work? How good is it?
- How does the EU's crisis response engage other local and international actors?

*Is the programme **coherent** (fully supported by all actors)?*

- Are there any local or external constraints on the programme's implementation?
- Is it backed by adequate funding and human resources, both locally and externally?

Is the issue of local ownership incorporated into the programme?

- Are local actors (and which ones?) involved in the planning of the EU's crisis-response initiatives, their design, implementation and evaluation?
- How is the prior needs assessment carried out? Is that based on an abstract, pre-conceived template or on local participation? (Needs vis-à-vis what end-state – please give examples.)

4. Fourth section: Good intentions, mixed results? Views on intentions, implementation and reception of the EU's crisis response in Ukraine

Start by asking: *Let's talk about convergence and divergence between the stated objectives of the EU's crisis response in Ukraine, their implementation and finally, reception on the ground. Do you think there is any gap between what the EU claims to do, and what the EU actually does in Ukraine? Please elaborate and specify, if needed, using the questions below.*

- What is the expected impact and the actual impact of the EU's crisis-response initiatives?
- What are the intended and unintended consequences of the EU's policies in Ukraine?
- How are the initiatives implemented by the EU perceived by local actors (beneficiaries, local implementers and stakeholders)?
- How do the various actors perceive the EU's overall role in the crisis (compared with other actors)?

5. Fifth section: Reflections

***Start by asking:** Stemming from your experience, how can the EU improve its crisis response in Ukraine? Let's focus specifically on the programme you have participated in and the EU's actions in Ukraine overall. What can be done to facilitate improvements?*

End of interview

Appendix 2

Selected Quotes from Interviews: Management, Local Ownership, Reputation(s) and Information¹⁰⁴

Management

The first problem with intentions is that the EU is not conceived as a unity, as one actor, as it represents many different states with different approaches. It is taken [somewhat] as a unity at the level of rhetoric but it is not at the level of actions. At the same time, I understand the EU invests a lot of time and resources in Ukraine but that **assistance is rather chaotic**. If you compare it with what the US does, [US efforts are] always clearly reported in the media. That's not the EU's case, I'm afraid. It's not clear to everyone what they do.¹⁰⁵

All EU procedures are time-consuming. Needs assessment takes time, too. When the decision is ready, it's not on time any more. **Not all tools developed for other crisis-response programmes are applicable in Ukraine**. For example, tents were not needed, as we have a different climate from Africa's.¹⁰⁶

I suggest that more efforts should be put into implementing the real **programmes with high impact**. The EU has great **schools on dialogue** (in Norway and Croatia). This can bring huge advances to the conflict resolution in Ukraine. Short-term projects targeted at civil society are not effective at all. There is no point in supporting a bulk of NGOs that rely upon five to six projects but are not sustainable. I have an idea the EU can develop: similar to what they do with the Year of Europe, they can assist in organising the Year of Donbas, the Year of IDPs (how to use modern instruments to fight stereotypes and biases, how to unify people, how to promote common values).¹⁰⁷

The EU avoids straightforward views on explaining the crisis. I think the EU has got the wrong perception of the situation on the ground, which they get, as a rule, from their supported partners. I even see some ironic coincidences: foreign aid is sent only to the places connected by the Intercity train. No comfortable well-organised connection (such as to Yasynovate and Dobropillya)? No donors, no aid. Why is it so? Because the **grantees appreciate comfort and safety**. They don't want to travel with difficulties and stay in poorly equipped hotels. They travel by Intercity, stay for four to five hours and go back to Kyiv. Such partners are not able to provide any real insight. Their views are based on rare short visits and desk research.¹⁰⁸

Short-term training is of limited impact in all fields. At the same time, a large bulk of funds is allocated to training. ... Some issues could be resolved more effectively if the EU were more active. I have the impression that the **larger part of funds is spent on administration in Brussels**, however, I don't know if it's 50, 20 or 80%. But I know an American aid project which spent 70% of the budget on the Washington-based staff. I assume it can be the case with other projects, too. Talks prevail.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Bold emphasis in the quotations has been added by the authors.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with a Ukrainian political actor, Kyiv, 17 November 2017.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with a Ukrainian lawyer and human rights defender working with IDPs, 17 November 2017.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with a Ukrainian political actor, Kyiv, 17 November 2017.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Ukrainian political actors, Kyiv, 24 November 2017.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with a Ukrainian journalist and stakeholder, Kyiv, 16 November 2017.

Needs assessment is done through consultations with their own NGOs and analytic centres (for example, Kvinna tu Kvinne in Sweden can provide consultations on gender issues in an Eastern European country). **Brussels institutions prefer contacts with the people and NGOs they know. In a sense, it's a closed club.** UNDP is also used as a one-stop shop for getting information. Each embassy has its own pool of local partners, which is merit-based as a rule.¹¹⁰

Lots of timely projects were rejected. For example, social laundry rooms for IDPs. The authorities confirmed that they are ready to provide premises. The costs included the purchase of washing machines, detergents and maintenance (US\$7,000). But it was not welcomed by the donors at all. I realised the reason: **the donors had some abstract template for needs assessment** but it was not based on the local situation (those who set the priorities have never visited the IDPs' residential areas). Sometimes the template is based on underestimations, sometimes it's overestimations.¹¹¹

Lack of coordination between the donors has also been an obstacle, particularly during the first year of the conflict. The Ukrainian NGO Forum, supported by DG ECHO since 2015, aims at improving coordination between the international donors and local counterparts. ... Over-bureaucratisation of the processes is widespread: standard agreement procedures are never prompt.¹¹²

Efficient use of resources is an urgent issue. In principle, the EU taxpayers' money is sent from the European community to the Ukrainian community. Yet, in fact, a large share of funds is being absorbed by go-between representatives of member states' governments and their plenipotentiaries.¹¹³

Good management is not provided by generous funding. I assume that budgets are large but when nearly 90% goes to maintain the office, it doesn't work like that. **Well-paid experts and motivated experts are two different things.**¹¹⁴

Standards of humanitarian aid should be improved. A humanitarian project life-cycle requires a **fast response**: money transfers should be scheduled in line with seasonal needs assessment.¹¹⁵

The procurement process is very complicated. If you buy computers, they should be produced in the selected countries, excluding China and Korea. It was not possible to find such an offer in the market. We were supposed to receive around 2 million, but we received 40% of that. Two years later, we have had no feedback from the donor, no confirmation we were audited successfully. We've decided we will never apply for the EU grants again. We feel an exaggerated level of distrust from the donor. Believe us, we don't have time to pinch the donors' money. We need to buy firewood, and we have to do it now (it's a very short time in summer). It cannot be postponed until we collect all the papers to justify why we choose a seller. We had better donate the money and buy it. If donors work with volunteers they have to attune the requirements, they cannot be treated as a corporation with staff to deal with donors' papers.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Interview with a Ukrainian political expert, Kyiv, 4 December 2017.

¹¹¹ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 24 November 2017.

¹¹² Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 16 November 2017.

¹¹³ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 21 November 2017.

¹¹⁴ Interview with a Ukrainian political actor, Kyiv, 17 November 2017.

¹¹⁵ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 16 November 2017.

¹¹⁶ Interview with a Ukrainian NGO dealing with IDPs, Kharkiv, 21 October 2017.

Local ownership

The local actors cannot provide a proper understanding of the crisis to the EU, because the EU acts at the national level and doesn't plunge into the regional level. **Regions get what was designed for the national level.** Local feedback is not taken to Brussels, as the local actors have no authoritative voice to guide the process. It is Kyiv, which speaks on behalf of the regions. But Kyiv doesn't understand the local situation at all because of the lack of communication and proper analysis.¹¹⁷

The local authorities have no expertise in filling out application forms to get foreign funding. The only way they can manage it is to follow the sample (if someone has done it before). One of the examples is LED lighting (one project for purchasing LED lights was done, so it was repeated several times in many places). A second problem is the lack of construction companies that are able to fulfil new projects (many have lost their equipment, sometimes it was taken by the terrorists in the occupied zones). So, if it's a few of them, and no competition is involved, the rates are very high. At the same time, companies from other regions are very reluctant to go there. There was one MOM project to restore 600 houses for IDPs to be settled there, but they had problems with finding an appropriate contractor.¹¹⁸

Another crucial problem is the lack of transparency in many spheres, which is **explained by security reasons during wartime** but, in fact, is often a pretext for **avoiding accountability**.¹¹⁹

Decentralisation brings risks to the effectiveness of implementation as the **regions suffer from a lack of qualified human resources**, lack of transparency and lack of independent media in the regions. Hierarchy is still important and accountability is still more important; otherwise, they don't understand what is a partnership and local ownership. A large part of civil society has become very conservative, not ready to fight for human rights.¹²⁰

Using pre-conceived templates and applying a **formal approach** is widespread, not only among the foreign actors but among the local implementers, too. Why is it so? Because analysis of the changing situation and development of new approaches require more efforts.¹²¹

We should also be aware of the personnel shortage on the ground. Many programmes engage so-called local activists (volunteers), but the **human resources in the civil sector are also limited**. ... A great deal of success [comes from] **local ownership, which is largely based on the human factor and leadership**.¹²²

Reputation(s)

Faster reaction, a more unified position, convergence of the declarations and practices in the migration policies (in line with international law) are a must. **Ukraine is perceived as a weak partner, as a buffer between the key players** (Europe, Russia and the US). This entails Ukraine's subordinated position, it's role can be compared to a pawn on the geopolitical

¹¹⁷ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 24 November 2017.

¹¹⁸ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 24 November 2017.

¹¹⁹ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 30 November 2017.

¹²⁰ Interview with a Ukrainian political actor, Kyiv, 4 December 2017.

¹²¹ Interview with a Ukrainian journalist working in the conflict zone, Kyiv, 20 November 2017.

¹²² Interview with a Ukrainian USAID representative, Kyiv, 31 October 2017.

chessboard. This does not lead to partnership, does not facilitate crisis resolution, and leads to **negative local perceptions of the EU**.¹²³

The crisis we observe in Ukraine is more a crisis of the European security system than the crisis in one selected country. Russian aggression in 2014 proved the existing mechanisms of the EU's crisis response to be inefficient. At the beginning of the conflict Ukraine was left alone to face the Russian invasions in Crimea and in the east, and to deal with both security and humanitarian consequences of the conflict. The first responses came from the US and Britain, **the EU avoided direct involvement**, insisting on negotiations with Russia and its proxies instead.¹²⁴

There was a period when the EU declared deep concern and many people in Ukraine understood that it was not able to help but could give money (which would be accepted as an indulgence for the EU's failure to act). **The EU was perceived as a bank rather than a mediator and active political actor.** ... Now it looks like a food basket sent down from the castle wall.¹²⁵

Many local experts estimate the EU's crisis response as **too little, too late, quite often misguided**.¹²⁶

It's typical for the EU to define the tasks in the civil sector. If you ask them **if they deal with the conflict, they will answer they do not intervene.** ... The EU's language is very sterile and spurious for taking into account all interests. ... It's a **struggle between values and interests in the EU** now. ... One of the current challenges is the **choice between security and freedom** during the conflict (which is made in favour of security).¹²⁷

Both local and external managers should be results-oriented, not process-oriented. My impression is that some European experts, particularly those who deal with security and humanitarian issues in the conflict zone, come here to earn money (as they have a higher salary grade because they deal with the conflict). They **monitor the situation without leaving their offices.** I know how they prepare reports from border zones sometimes: they just call volunteers ('do you know if it is quiet in Avdiivka today?'), add some official reports of the ATO headquarters, and here we are. They don't care, and it's obvious to the local people they work with. To be honest, **foreign security experts have a pretty bad reputation** (they stay till the end of their contact term and get out of here). They sell some illusory danger, as most of their offices are located in peaceful cities, and they never go to war zones.¹²⁸

I've heard from many locals that they are very disappointed with the quality of the foreign support. **Humanitarian assistance is in place but is not a durable solution** (it also has some negative effects, as it involves protectionism and dependency on the external aid). At the same time, when the foreign representatives come for needs assessment it looks like fieldwork with no follow-up. They come, ask questions and leave. That's how the locals typically describe it.¹²⁹

¹²³ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 23 November 2017.

¹²⁴ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 30 November 2017.

¹²⁵ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 24 November 2017.

¹²⁶ Interview with a Ukrainian human rights expert, Kyiv, 23 November 2017.

¹²⁷ Interview with a Ukrainian political expert, Kyiv, 4 December 2017.

¹²⁸ Interview with a Ukrainian journalist working in the conflict zone, Kyiv, 20 November 2017.

¹²⁹ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 20 November 2017.

Since 2014 we have regularly been invited to the meetings of the international cluster (meetings of donors) and I see how detached they are from real people. I think **many of them follow the resources**. One of the European experts supposed to monitor our project did not show up during the eight months of the project. Never. He stayed in Ukraine for all that period but he was not interested to meet us. They like comfortable places and avoid going to the meetings that might be below the standard. Our civil society should not become spoiled with such donor support, which does not contribute to its development and sustainability. It should not fall apart like a house of cards the next day.¹³⁰

It seems there is **no PR strategy to present the EU-supported projects to a wider public** in Ukraine. This gap is used by the local authorities: the beneficiaries perceive aid as support from other public sources.¹³¹

At the same time, I think the **EU is in a better position than the projects initiated by USAID** (we've even agreed with USAID that we won't put their logo on the materials we disseminate, as people in Donbas don't trust the US). The EU should utilise these image preferences to increase their impact.¹³²

The EU should be more coherent if the goal is to help, to make real changes (rather than pretending they help). In fact, regardless of the current effectiveness, when it deals with perceptions, **the EU is in a better position than the US (simply for the reason that Europe is closer, it still means common values that are understandable for Ukrainians)**. Still, the EU does not play the first violin in the conflict response here. The Americans do, while the EU is rather passive, supporting a bulk of ineffective NGOs they familiar with. They could have done more, just within the budgets they allocate to Ukraine now.¹³³

I think **MOM (supported by the EU) is the most recognisable donor in the east**. We definitely don't need more funding; we need more efficient management of the existing projects and more visibility.¹³⁴

Information

Russia put much effort into maintaining its stakeholders and satellites in the West and in the occupied territories. The stronger the EU supports Ukraine, the more intensive the Russian counteraction.¹³⁵

Another problem is the reception of the EU response, especially in eastern Ukraine, which has a 'Soviet' paternalistic approach. This means that they tend to perceive aid without making a big difference between projects. Money given from the state institutions or European ones are all the same for them. ... Most people in Donbas do not use Facebook and do not speak Ukrainian, while most of the news about the EU is spread through Facebook or the Ukrainian media. It is a big question whether the population in the east is ready to 'learn' European values.¹³⁶

¹³⁰ Interview with a Ukrainian NGO representative, Kyiv, 26 November 2017.

¹³¹ Interview with a Ukrainian political expert, Kyiv, 24 November 2017.

¹³² Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 20 November 2017.

¹³³ Interview with a Ukrainian political actor, Kyiv, 17 November 2017.

¹³⁴ Interview with a Ukrainian USAID representative, Kyiv, 31 October 2017.

¹³⁵ Interview with a Ukrainian human rights defender, Kyiv, 1 December 2017.

¹³⁶ Interview with the Renaissance Foundation representative, Kharkiv, 22 October 2017.

There is a large asymmetry between the information that Russian propaganda gives and the message the European Union wants to give. The Russian message is really simple and clear, while information about 'European values' is very complicated to explain.¹³⁷

Interest in Ukraine is declining significantly, it's no longer on the map of the world's hot spots. Media coverage explains a great deal of public attention and, consequently, donors' involvement.¹³⁸

Cooperation with donors is often perceived in the occupied territories as collaboration with foreign intelligence services – you can be accused of spying. That's why it's hard to monitor human rights there. **Civil society and the press are under huge pressure there**, it's even worse than in Russia.¹³⁹

The consensus on the EU at the level of elites is much more consolidated than at the level of civil society. The myths produced by the Russian Federation are implemented quite effectively. The group of people who have a proper understanding of the events in Ukraine is expanding but it's still small. *Internews* (Ukraine–World project), *UKMC* and *Nashi* are working hard to improve communication with the EU. **There are some European experts who are knowledgeable but we need more experts.** More information in Europe is requested. Otherwise, the maps with Russian Crimea will be continually published in European countries. Invitations to new independent experts, journalists and researchers by Ukraine is an effective tool of communication. StratCom is a European institution for counter-propaganda.¹⁴⁰

I think that unofficial reports have done a lot to improve the EU's understanding of Ukraine's crisis. At the same time, I think **the EU as a donor has become a hostage of the recipient**: after having spent so much money and effort here, the donor cannot admit the effort was not successful. **It needs success stories**, it is in a sense dependent on the local authorities and is afraid of a critical approach. It's a risky moment, as the authorities do not see limits in breaking the rules. They claim that if the EU does not say anything in public, then everything is okay.¹⁴¹

It should be understood in Ukraine that we are not a top priority for the EU. **A typical member of the European Parliament does not start his day with reading news about Ukraine.** Not surprisingly, many of those I've met in Brussels were convinced that the Ukrainian authorities are quite successful in managing the crisis and, in fact, the hot conflict is over. **Luckily, many missions produce regular reports** (I mean the UN Monitoring Mission, OSCE, UNHCR, so those who need to check up what's going on can at least find it in the reports). So, even if Ukraine is not on the mainstream European agenda, it can be discussed in the margins of the summits and meetings in the EU (and we are grateful for an opportunity to attend the meetings and speak up on behalf of the civil society sector).¹⁴²

Russia should become an issue for grounded discussions in Eastern Europe and the EU. It is not the first time that Russia triggered the conflict. What development path does Russia take?

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, 16 November 2017.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with a Ukrainian political analyst, Kyiv, 4 December 2017.

¹⁴¹ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kyiv, 17 November 2017.

¹⁴² Ibid.

It is a serious issue for the world. Such discussion should be initiated asap. Ukraine can be a mediator in such a dialogue between Russia and Europe.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Interview with a Ukrainian stakeholder, Kharkiv, 21 October 2017.