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Crimea

Editors

Dr. Hanna Shelest
Dr. Mykola Kapitonenko

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Contacts:

website: <http://ukraine-analytica.org/>
e-mail: Ukraine_analytica@ukr.net
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ukraineanalytica>
Twitter: https://twitter.com/UA_Analytica

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SHOULD WE FEEL LONELY? ASSESSING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT OF UKRAINE REGARDING CRIMEA

Yar Batoh

KSE StratBase, Kyiv School of Economics

Khrystyna Holynska

Pardee RAND Graduate School

The annexation of Crimea is and will remain one of the main issues on Ukraine's foreign policy agenda. Every year, the matter gains international attention when the UN General Assembly adopts a resolution supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity. As the time goes by, some countries shift their position, seeking to find a balance between their relations with Ukraine (or even the West) and Russia. In this paper, we explore voting trends on UN resolutions regarding Crimea and regional allocation of support. We analyse the rhetoric of the leadership of 12 G20 countries, investigating arguments justifying their votes. We then make recommendations on where Ukraine could seek support.

Introduction

In February 2014, the Russian army in unmarked uniforms began the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula. In less than a month, on 18 March, after an illegal referendum that allegedly showed that the peninsula population favours "reunification" with Russia, the Kremlin formally proclaimed the annexation of Crimea. These events shocked the world, and Ukraine was successfully able to gain wide diplomatic support. This was reflected in the votes of the United Nations General Assembly resolution 68/262 "Territorial Integrity of Ukraine", passed on 27 March. The resolution affirmed the commitment to the territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders, declared the Crimean "referendum" illegal, and condemned Russia's illegal annexation of the peninsula. The resolution was supported by 100 nations, with only 11

countries voting against (the remaining 82 countries abstained or did not vote).

Although the focus of international Ukrainian agenda shifted somewhat to the invasion of Donbas and the Minsk process that followed, Ukraine has carried on with its diplomatic work on Crimea. Every year since 2016, our delegation to the United Nations, backed by Western allies acting as co-sponsors, puts forward the resolutions on the "Situation of Human Rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, Ukraine", which have been successfully adopted in the last five years. After Russia's attack in the Kerch Strait in 2018, Ukraine additionally brought up the issue of the militarisation of Crimea and the surrounding seas in the General Assembly, initiating three resolutions on the "Problem of the Militarisation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, Ukraine, as well as

Parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov”, adopted in 2018, 2019, and 2020. The latter have a slightly different emphasis compared to the resolutions on human rights, but both serve as useful indicators for measuring the support of Ukraine’s position on Crimea in the world.



Every year since 2016, our delegation to the United Nations, backed by Western allies acting as co-sponsors, puts forward the resolutions on the “Situation of Human Rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, Ukraine”, which have been successfully adopted in the last five years

As the first summit of the newly inaugurated Crimean Platform¹ initiated by Ukraine is approaching, the positions on the issue expressed by some states through voting on “Crimean resolutions” and official statements of their high-level government officials deserve a closer look. While obviously not painting the full picture of the countries’ stance, they still send a crucial message from the diplomatic perspective, allowing not only to understand better where we stand, but also to identify where we should put our attention in terms of securing support for efforts to restore Ukraine’s territorial integrity.

Research Design

To measure diplomatic support of or opposition to Ukraine’s position on Crimea, we used two sets of evidence. First, we collected the voting results for the abovementioned 2014-2019 resolutions of the UN General Assembly from its official website and compiled them into one spreadsheet². The details of the voting for two 2020 resolutions have not been published yet, but the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the UN, Sergiy Kyslytsya, re-tweeted the results for one of them.³ We analysed the voting results concerning any observable trends/changes of support and explored their regional dimensions.

Next, we studied the rhetoric on the Crimea issue. For the purposes of this research, we limited ourselves to the G20 nations. The positions of eight of them (Russia, the EU and EU countries, USA, and Canada) are explicit and have not changed since 2014; therefore, they were excluded from this analysis. For the other 12 nations, we collected statements of high-level officials that had mentions of Crimea. To do so, we searched for “Crimea” on the websites of their ministries of foreign affairs (both through the search on their website directly and through Google search engine). To ensure that all relevant information was collected, we compiled a list with the names of the presidents, prime ministers, and ministers for foreign affairs of these countries and additionally searched on Google for their statements on Crimea. If the

- 1 According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The Crimean Platform is a new consultative and coordination format initiated by Ukraine to increase the effectiveness of the international response to the ongoing occupation of Crimea, respond to growing security challenges, strengthen international pressure on the Kremlin, prevent further human rights violations, protect victims of the occupation regime. The Platform’s key objective is de-occupation of Crimea and its return to Ukraine”. See *Dmytro Kuleba Informs OSCE Participating States about Five Priorities of the Crimean Platform*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 03 December 2020 [<https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/dmytro-kuleba-informs-osce-participating-states-about-five-priorities-crimean-platform> access: 19 February 2021].
- 2 *A Database with Voting Results for Crimea Resolutions at the UN*, February 2021 [shorturl.at/vxB08 access: 26 February 2021].
- 3 EU at UN-NY, #UNGA passes recurring Res on demilitarization of #Crimea, Twitter, 07 December 2020 [<https://twitter.com/EUatUN/status/1336013730191183872/photo/1> access: 26 February 2021].

statement was found in the media or a policy paper, we specifically tried to locate it in any official sources mentioned above to verify its authenticity. Out of all the statements collected, we were unable to track down only one – by Xi Jinping, but it was published in China Daily, an English-language daily newspaper owned by the Chinese Communist Party. Given its affiliation, for the purposes of this article, we treated China Daily as equivalent to an official source.

Additionally, we looked into the language expressed on the floor of the UN General Assembly prior to and after the votes. We analysed the arguments presented by the representatives of 12 of the G20 countries selected for this research.

General Patterns of UN Voting on Crimean Resolutions

International support of Ukraine, expressed through positive vote on the UN resolutions on Crimea, was highest in 2014. One hundred countries (60%) supported the document that affirmed Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and condemned the "referendum" in Crimea as illegitimate. Eighty-two abstained or were absent and only 11 voted "No". Two years later, in 2016, the situation changed drastically. The number of countries supporting the resolution fell to 70, below the number of opposing (which more than doubled) or abstaining countries combined. This downward trend has never reversed. The number of "Yes" votes dropped even further, from 70 in 2016 to 63 in 2020. More countries chose a neutral position, and since 2016, the majority of votes were cast as "Abstain" or were not cast at all (113 such votes for the 2020 resolution on militarisation of Crimea). The relatively good news is that this downward trend is moderate, and after Russia's attack in the Kerch Strait, the number of countries opposing the resolutions fell (from 27 against the human rights resolution in 2018 to 23 against the same resolution in 2019 and 17 against the militarisation resolution in 2020).

An analysis of votes of 12 G20 countries selected for this paper shows a similar trend. Support for the Crimea resolution was highest in 2014, when seven countries voted favourably and none opposed. However, this support has also been quickly lost. Only three of the 12 countries steadily vote "Yes" (Australia, Japan, and Turkey), while the others oscillate between opposing and more neutral, "Abstain", votes. China has the biggest number of the "No" votes – for all resolutions but one (on militarisation in 2018). With every new resolution, more and more countries in this selection lean toward abstaining votes.

Overall, there is hardly any risk for the resolutions not to be passed in the near future. The analysis of the voting results shows that Ukraine still has a strong support. Fifty-three countries have voted favourably for all resolutions adopted so far. This group consists mostly, but not exclusively, of the "collective West" and includes nine G20 countries. At the same time, only 10 countries consistently oppose all the resolutions – Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Cuba, DPRK, Nicaragua, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe. Four more countries have voted against all resolutions but the 2014 one, and China has voted against all resolutions but two.

Some trends are concerning and require additional attention to preserve or regain the support. On the one hand, 52 countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Kenya, Pakistan, and Vietnam, have opted for not being "dragged into the conflict" and took a neutral position from the very beginning. On the other hand, as many as 74 countries have changed their positions over the past seven years. Unfortunately, Ukraine has lost the support of 40 of these countries, including such influential nations as Chile, Indonesia, Mexico, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia. Even among those 40 countries, some tend to change votes frequently. Five countries have switched their positions back and forth

between “Yes” and “Abstain”, while five others moved from “Yes” to “Abstain” after 2014, and three countries have changed their positions several times, utilising all three possible voting options at different times.

The already existing success stories add more optimism to this endeavour. Ukraine has been able to regain the support of seven countries that had previously switched away from “Yes” to “Abstain”. Botswana and Zambia supported the resolutions the last time they voted, even though in 2014 they abstained. Finally, nine countries moved from a strong opposition (a “No” vote) into a more neutral stance and abstained during the last recorded voting.



Europe accounts for a large part of the support Ukraine has received for the Crimean resolutions in the last few years. In 2020, 38 out of the 63 “Yes” votes came from European countries

While individual votes show many interesting patterns of support and/or shift in positions, they are even more informative when analysed through the regional lens. The regional belonging of a country provides important insights that could be utilised by the policymakers. The next section of this paper explores this in depth.

Zooming into the Regions

There is always a regional dimension to foreign policy. It is reflected both in the expressions describing the country’s foreign policy (i.e., “US-Asia policy”, “Russian policy in the Near Abroad”, “Ukraine’s European policy”) and in the structure of the ministries

for foreign affairs, which include “regional” units. Therefore, a regional dimension of the support augments the recommended course of action with an important layer.

Europe accounts for a large part of the support Ukraine has received for the Crimean resolutions in the last few years. In 2020, 38 out of the 63 “Yes” votes came from European countries. Although the region expresses almost unanimous support, there are two outliers – Bosnia and Herzegovina consistently abstains, and Serbia opposes. Given their close relationship with Russia, the reluctance to support “anti-Russian” resolutions is understandable. However, Ukraine can and should work on switching Serbia’s vote to, at least, “Abstain”. A smart move in this case would be to approach it indirectly, through the European Union, as Belgrade is eager to join the bloc and the EU-27 are keen on speaking with one voice on international matters.

The situation is not favourable for Ukraine in the **post-Soviet** space. Two satellites of Russia, Belarus and Armenia, oppose the resolutions, while Georgia and Moldova, which share with Ukraine the same problem of occupied territories, support them. No Central Asian country has ever voted in favour of the resolution, but a positive trend can be found in that only Kyrgyzstan voted against last year, while previously all of them, except for Turkmenistan, did so. Thus, Ukraine’s efforts should be directed to preserving their neutrality. One important failure, which should be recognised in this regard, is the lost support of Azerbaijan. In 2014, this country condemned the annexation, treating it as analogous to Nagorno-Karabakh, which Azerbaijan claimed was occupied by Armenia. However, Azerbaijan is also trying to balance between the West (which in this case implies support for Ukraine) and Russia, whose support it wants to gain.⁴

4 A. Valiyev, *Azerbaijan’s Balancing Act in the Ukraine Crisis*, “Ponars Eurasia - Policy Memos”, September 2014.

Latin American countries mostly (23 out of 33) abstained or were absent during voting for the resolution in 2020. Ukraine managed to gain support of seven of them and should concentrate on maintaining this, as some countries, for example, Honduras, have abstained in the past. Hardly anything can be done about Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, which will continue to support Russia. Bolivia's position has shifted. In 2019, it abstained for the first time after consistently voting against, which may be credited more to the ousting of Evo Morales than to Ukraine's diplomatic efforts. Nevertheless, there are many countries that deserve Kyiv's attention, as they have voted "Yes" for the resolutions in the past. Support of four of them (Antigua and Barbuda, El Salvador, Haiti, Saint Kitts and Nevis) may be easier to regain, as there have been instances of their positive votes for the resolution after 2014. Six more countries supported the resolution only in 2014; thus, these might be more difficult to work with. This group, however, includes such influential countries as Chile, Colombia, and Mexico; therefore, it may still be worth the effort.



Asia may be regarded as the least favourable region for Ukraine. Although the majority of Asian countries abstained in 2020, it is the only region where more countries choose "No" over "Yes"

The Middle East also turns out to be a neutral region, with 10 out of 14 countries abstaining. Turkey and Israel – historically close allies to the West – support Ukraine, while Russia's close partners Iran and Syria oppose the resolution. There have been instances when Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar voted "Yes" after 2014; therefore, they should be the primary targets for Ukrainian diplomacy. Bahrain, Jordan, and Kuwait have

been less supportive after 2014 (switching from "Yes" to "Abstain") but are also worth keeping in focus as they voted favourably in the past and so there is a chance they might switch their position again.

Asia may be regarded as the least favourable region for Ukraine. Although the majority of Asian countries abstained in 2020, it is the only region where more countries choose "No" over "Yes". The former include communist states (China, Laos, and DPRK) or authoritarian regimes (Cambodia, Myanmar). Japan, Singapore, and Maldives supported Ukraine in 2020, but the latter two used to abstain in the past. The only clear candidate for more diplomatic engagement on the matter is Bhutan – it consistently supports the resolution on the human rights in Crimea, but abstains during the voting on the militarisation of the peninsula and surrounding maritime areas. A similar situation is with Laos, as it is against the militarisation resolution, while abstaining during the voting on the human rights one. India, on the contrary, abstains on the militarisation resolution, but votes against the human rights one. A closer look into India's statement, presented in the next section, shows some reasoning behind this interesting tendency. Indonesia, Malaysia, Korea, and Thailand supported the 2014 resolution, but since then have remained neutral. Probably the biggest success in this region is that the Philippines switched their vote from "No" to "Abstain". It suggests that the same result can be achieved with Myanmar, as it has already abstained in the past. China's position can hardly be changed – it abstained during the climaxes of the crisis (2014, militarisation resolution in 2018), but then has consistently voted "No".

Oceania, on the contrary, is the most favourable region for Ukraine. No country there has ever voted against the resolutions, and in 2020, six out of 14 countries supported it. Although Oceanic countries

rarely figure prominently in Ukraine's foreign policy considerations, five countries (Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Palau, and Kiribati) may still be worth looking at, as they have supported the resolution in the past.

Finally, Ukraine has clearly underperformed in **Africa**, given the positive image of our country there.⁵ In 2020, Botswana and Liberia supported the resolution, Sudan and Zimbabwe opposed it, while the rest (50 countries) abstained or did not vote. First of all, we should work with the five countries that have changed their position from "No" to "Abstain" to make sure that this trend is not reversed – Angola, Chad, Comoros, Guinea, and South Africa. It is important to also pay attention to countries that vote neutrally on the militarisation resolutions but against the human rights resolutions. It would be important to understand the reasoning behind it, which is likely based on the language referring to human rights and not directly because of their strong position on Crimea. Ukraine should not lose its focus on these countries, taking into account Russia's recent efforts to elevate its cooperation with African states. Zambia, Tunisia, Sierra Leone, Seychelles, and Djibouti also deserve Kyiv's attention, as there have been instances when they voted "Yes" for the resolutions after 2014 and thus may change their position once again. Fourteen countries supported Ukraine's territorial integrity in 2014 but have been abstaining since then, with Nigeria, Cameroon, Madagascar, and Libya among them.

The regional perspective has allowed us to look beyond some common-sense assumptions. To make a few generalisations, Europe and Oceania (North America as

well, but we did not look into this region specifically, as its support has been stably present) are the most supportive regions, while Asia and the post-Soviet space are the least supportive ones. Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East remain neutral (which deserves specific attention on how to preserve that). The next section will dive deeper into the arguments provided by some of the countries representing these regions for support of or opposition to the resolution.

What Do the Big Players Say?

The primary purpose of diplomatic statements is to be known to the world. Thus, while we understand that some statements could have slipped our attention, our search was diligent enough to justify our claim that the salience of the Crimea issue is extremely low for those countries whose statements are not easily found.

Out of 12 countries chosen for this analysis, we have not been able to locate any statements on Crimea for four of them. It shows their reluctance to be actively involved in the standoff between Ukraine and Russia, although their voting reveals more nuances to their positions. Only **Brazil** consistently abstained in the General Assembly votes, while **South Korea** and **Saudi Arabia** supported the resolution initially and shifted to "Abstain" only later (the former in 2016, the latter in 2017). **South Africa**, like Brazil, abstained at the heyday of the conflict in 2014, but afterwards took a more negative stance by voting "No". This changed again after Russia's attack in the Kerch Strait. Since then, the African member of BRICS abstains. Moreover, they have not spoken on the UN General Assembly floor on the matter. The only comment was in 2014,

5 Чому Африка може навчити Україну - інтерв'ю з експертом (What Africa Can Teach Ukraine – Interview with an Expert), "24 TV", 11 January 2021 [https://novyny.24tv.ua/chomu-mozhe-navchiti-afrika-ukrayinu-intervyu-ekspertom-mizhnarodnikom_n1505509 access: 14 February 2021].

when Brazil's representative expressed concern about the situation but stressed the importance of stakeholders exercising maximum restraint.⁶

One more country that wants to preserve its neutrality is **Mexico**. It has abstained ever since 2016, despite having supported the original 2014 resolution. The only official statement identified was made by Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Carlos de Icaza Gonzalez in 2015, who reiterated that Mexico condemns the violation of the United Nations Charter, but did not go further to discuss Russia's responsibility for the Crimea annexation.⁷

Indonesia voted the same way as Mexico, supporting the first resolution but abstaining from the following ones. The language used in the 2014 statement⁸ is ambiguous. On the one hand, the country clearly condemns the annexation of Crimea and supports Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. On the other hand, the protests in Ukraine that preceded the annexation are referred to as an "upheaval" and the emphasis is made on the importance of a "constitutional" shift of power as opposed to "illegitimate" demonstrations. Also, the confrontation with Russia, according to the statement, is hurting the entire world, involving other countries such as the US and leading to

destabilisation. A similar argument was reiterated in a speech by Indonesia's representative during the UN General Assembly vote.⁹ This language may partially explain the tendency to abstain but also, since the statement is clearly emphasising that the events in Ukraine are not directly affecting Indonesia in any way, may signify that this position may not be easily shifted (hopefully, in either direction).

Argentina has abstained from the very beginning, noting that the resolutions divide the world into spheres of influence, making nations choose sides instead of focusing on conflict prevention.¹⁰ In almost all available statements (we used two statements released in 2014 and one from 2017), Argentina's officials explicitly express support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and outline the importance of protecting human rights. At the same time, they accuse the West of "double standards", drawing analogies to the referendum in an "occupation" of the Falkland Islands.¹¹ The same language is used in Argentina's representative's speech at the UN General Assembly, who also stated that the resolution was taking sides in the conflict, isolating one party and imposing unilateral economic sanctions, undermining the opportunities for dialogue.¹² The 2017 statement is quite different from the two published in 2014. It is more oriented toward conflict prevention,

6 *Official Records of the 73rd Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly Seventy-Second Session*, UN, 19 December 2017 [<https://undocs.org/en/A/72/PV.73> access: 20 February 2021].

7 *México en el mundo. Temas estratégicos del senado. Tomo 5 (Mexico in the World. Strategic Topics of the Senate. Volume 5)*, Senate of Mexico, 16-19 February 2015 [www.senado.gob.mx access: 20 February 2021].

8 *Indonesia Respects Ukraine's Sovereignty: Marty*, Indonesian Embassy, 20 March 2014 [indonesianembassy.hu access: 20 February 2021].

9 *Official Records of the 41st Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly Seventy-Fourth Session*, UN, 09 December 2019 [<https://undocs.org/en/A/74/PV.41> access: 20 February 2021].

10 H. Timerman, *Argentina, Ucrania y el doble estándar (Argentina, Ukraine, and the Double Standard)*, "Pagina12", 30 March 2014 [www.pagina12.com.ar access: 20 February 2021].

11 *El Presidente Putin llamó a la Presidenta Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (President Putin Called President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner)*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Commerce and Worship of Argentina [cancilleria.gob.ar access: 20 February 2021].

12 UN, n.6.

the importance of human rights, and protection of minorities. Interestingly, the double standards rhetoric is also absent, while the statement still places emphasis on the legal side of the issue.¹³ It did not, however, reflect any changes in Argentina's position, which balances between the US and Russia. Thus, its neutrality may be considered as a good enough trend.

Three G20 members that belong to the "collective West" expectedly provide consistent support for Ukraine's position. They are also quite vocal in expressing their positions on protection of Ukraine's territorial integrity. The **Australian** government was swift to announce in 2014 that it would join the sanctions regime and has expanded it after that.¹⁴ It has also used the floor of the UN Security Council to strongly condemn Russian actions and support Ukraine's sovereignty over Crimea.¹⁵ We found a comparatively large number of statements¹⁶ that contain similar and quite harsh language, signifying the strength of support.

Turkey also declared from the beginning that it supported the territorial integrity of Ukraine and would not recognise the illegal annexation of Crimea.¹⁷ Its representative was very vocal during the discussion of the first resolution (in 2014) at the UN General Assembly.¹⁸ In 2019¹⁹ and 2020²⁰, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs released statements on the anniversary on the so-called "referendum" in Crimea, reinstating its support for Ukraine's position and emphasising the importance of the Crimean Tatars' wellbeing and security. The frequency of Turkey's statements on Ukraine and their clear and harsh language signify its continuing support of Ukraine's position.

Although **Japan's** sanctions are rather symbolic, the country offers strong diplomatic support to Ukraine, including co-sponsoring of the resolutions. It declared the "referendum" illegal as soon as it was announced,²¹ did not recognise its results afterwards, and explicitly called for Russia not to attempt annexation.²² Although Japanese officials did not mention Crimea

13 *Explicación de Voto luego del voto de la resolución sobre "Situación de los Derechos Humanos en la República Autónoma de Crimea y la Ciudad de Sebastopol (Ucrania)" (Explanation of the Vote after the Vote on the Resolution on the "Situation of Human Rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, Ukraine")*, Permanent Representation of Argentina at the United Nations, 14 November 2017 [cancilleria.gob.ar access: 20 February 2021].

14 *Expanded Sanctions against Russia Come into Force*, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 31 March 2015 [www.dfat.gov.au access: 20 February 2021].

15 *The Situation in Ukraine*, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 18 June 2015 [www.dfat.gov.au access: 20 February 2021].

16 We have identified six such statements made in 2014-2015.

17 *The Crisis in the East of Ukraine Can Be Permanently Resolved Only through Peaceful Methods*, Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 20 March 2015 [tcgb.gov.tr access: 20 February 2021].

18 UN, n.6.

19 *Press Release Regarding the Fifth Anniversary of the Illegal Annexation of Crimea*, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16 March 2019 [mfa.gov.tr access: 20 February 2021].

20 *Press Release Regarding the Sixth Anniversary of the Illegal Annexation of Crimea*, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16 March 2020 [mfa.gov.tr access: 20 February 2021].

21 *Press Conference by Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, 18 March 2018 [mofa.go.jp access: 20 February 2021].

22 *Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan on the Measures against Russia over the Crimea Referendum*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 18 March 2014 [mofa.go.jp access: 20 February 2021].

in their conversations with Russian counterparts during two 2020 meetings,^{23,24} their support to Ukraine remains in place,²⁵ including through diplomatic sanctions, such as the exclusion of Russia from G8.²⁶ As with the previous two countries, the frequency of statements and their explicit language indicate continuous support that must be maintained through diplomatic ties.

India's shift under Narendra Modi from non-alignment in foreign policy to enhanced cooperation with the United States did not reflect in any way in the country's support for Ukraine. Considering China as the main threat, New Delhi is careful not to risk its relations with Moscow over Kyiv. We have found only two statements: Prime Minister Modi's interview²⁷ and a conversation between him and Vladimir Putin.²⁸ The language of both is very evasive, with a stress on the importance of hearing both sides and promoting dialogue. Such unwillingness to take sides is also reflected in its voting for the resolution; thus, its desire to balance should be accounted for in Ukraine's diplomatic work.

As we have already mentioned, **China** abstained twice at the two climaxes of the conflict, but otherwise has consistently voted against the resolutions, citing that those only deepen the confrontation.²⁹ Chinese statements on Crimea since 2014 are quite rare and are mostly explanations for the country's vote at the UN.³⁰ Yet, China actively participates in the discussions of the resolutions at the UN General Assembly. Its representatives spoke in 2014, 2017, and 2019, reiterating that China strongly opposes country-specific resolutions on human rights. However, in 2017, China Daily informed that Xi Jinping said during a meeting with then Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko that China would like to play a constructive role in the political resolution of Ukraine's crisis, without specifically mentioning Crimea or Donbas.³¹ Although this quote of President Xi is interesting, we hardly can consider it as support for Ukraine or China's genuine desire to be involved in the settlement of the conflict between Kyiv and Moscow, especially given its vote and strong ties to Russia.

23 *Japan-Russia Summit Telephone Talk*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 07 May 2020 [mofa.go.jp access: 20 February 2021].

24 *Japan-Russia Foreign Ministers' Meeting*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 15 February 2020 [mofa.go.jp access: 20 February 2021].

25 *Japan-Ukraine Foreign Ministers' Meeting*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 21 October 2019 [mofa.go.jp access: 20 February 2021].

26 *Press Conference by Foreign Minister Taro Kono*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 27 August 2019 [mofa.go.jp access: 20 February 2021].

27 *Prime Minister's Interview to CNN's Fareed Zakaria*, Ministry of External Affairs of India, 21 September 2014 [mea.gov.in access: 20 February 2021].

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31 *China Aims to Play Constructive Role in Solving Ukraine Crisis*, "China Daily", 18 January 2017 [www.chinadaily.com.cn access: 20 February 2021].

The analysis of the official statements of the leadership of 12 of the G20 countries included in this research shows that the issue remains salient for many of them. Moreover, they provide clear arguments to justify their position. The reasoning of some is quite expected (for example, Argentina appealing to the situation with the Falkland Islands or Turkey talking about protecting the Crimean Tatars), while for others, ambiguous language (i.e., India) tells a lot by itself. A diplomatic effort for gaining and maintaining their support can go a long way, using these statements as a baseline.

Conclusion

The voting results for the “Crimean resolutions” since 2014 reveal that the support for Ukraine is gradually declining, with favourable “Yes” votes being down from 100 in 2014 to 70 in 2016 and 63 in 2020. At the same time, the decline is also happening with regard to countries opposing, especially recently, after an uptick in 2016-2018. Over the past seven years, 74 countries have changed their positions, and, although Ukraine has lost the support of 40 of them, there are quite a few success stories of countries moving from “No” to “Abstain” and from the latter to “Yes” that serve as an illustration of how this negative trend can be reversed.

The regional breakdown shows that most of the support comes from the “collective West” – first of all, Europe, although even there Bosnia and Serbia undermine the unanimity. The post-Soviet space, due to Russia’s influence, turned out to be quite a difficult region to work with, but Azerbaijan and several Central Asian countries are still worth the effort. Latin American, Asian, and Middle Eastern countries have mostly chosen neutrality, but there are at least 20 countries that have supported the resolutions in the past and about half

of them have continued to do so after 2014. Oceania turned out to be the most favourable region for Ukraine, while Kyiv clearly underperforms in Africa. Almost all African countries have refrained from taking sides during the 2020 voting, and over the past six years, we have lost the support of 19 of them.

The positions of the G20 nations follow the same pattern – gradual decline of support, combined with prevalence of strong support over strong opposition and the potential to do better. Half of the countries have condemned Russia’s actions regarding Crimea, while only three (excluding Russia) have taken a position rather favourable to the Kremlin. The rest prefer to stay neutral, but Kyiv has to pay attention to Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Indonesia as those countries have supported us in the past and may well do so in the future if given a good reason.



The analysis of the official statements of the leadership of 12 of the G20 countries included in this research shows that the issue remains salient for many of them

The upcoming summit of the Crimean Platform will serve as another indicator of international support for Ukraine’s stance on the peninsula. The present analysis reveals that there are still many countries that share our position and should be engaged within the new format. There are many opportunities to “win” more partners, and for that, the Ukrainian government should look primarily not to Europe or the post-Soviet space, but to the regions that have traditionally received less attention – Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, and especially Africa.

Finally, it is worth noting that this work can and should be augmented by commentary of experts on particular regions and countries. The present analysis was done solely on the basis of voting results on the “Crimean resolutions”, G20 representatives’ statements, and the authors’ own knowledge and understanding of international affairs. Therefore, there is a chance that some important details or developments in particular countries have slipped our attention. It means that every country that we have identified as worth Ukraine’s diplomatic efforts should be analysed more closely by the experts or government officials specialising in them.

Yar Batoh is the director of KSE StratBase and a research assistant at The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies. His main research interests are security studies, Russian foreign policy, and Ukrainian-Russian relations. Previously, he worked at VoxUkraine. Yar Batoh graduated from the Institute of International Relations, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.

Khrystyna Holynska is a PhD candidate at Pardee RAND Graduate School (Santa Monica, USA) and a visiting professor at Kyiv School of Economics (Department of Public Policy and Governance). She serves as an expert for reforms monitoring project iMoRe of VoxUkraine. In 2017-2020, she worked as the head of KSE StratBase and a strategic analyst for The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies.

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