THE UKRAINIAN / CRIMEAN CRISIS AND ITS PERCEPTION BY POLISH THINK TANKS: CONCEPTUALIZING PUBLIC / PRIVATE ACTORS IN FOREIGN POLICY¹

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The Ukrainian / Crimean crisis is commonly perceived as a major systemic crisis in Europe since the end of the Cold War. With Russian Federation activities involved, it is claimed to surpass even the Balkan crisis of the 1990s. Thus, the current crisis’ significance calls for some deliberate study of its perception by major “third sector” players: think tanks. The study covers one of the Ukrainian and Russian neighbors – Poland.

The aim of the paper is twofold. First, it investigates how the crisis is covered by two of the most recognized Polish think tanks that are active in foreign policy: The Polish Institute of International Affairs (Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, PISM) and The Centre for Eastern Studies (Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, OSW). Second, since external relations are typically seen as one of few resources still in state’s capacity, the question of private (i.e. non-state) actors’ role is investigated. The question: “How much private is legitimate in public sphere?” is relevant not only in normative sphere (freedom of association, freedom of speech, etc.) but, more importantly, in empirical one: What is the role of private actors in meeting public/private interests? Thus, the paper tries to put the issue in some conceptual framework.

Keywords: Think Tanks, Poland, Foreign Policy, Ukraine, Private Actors.
INTRODUCTION

The question of think tanks’ role is widely studied in the US and Western academia, and foreign policy is not an exception to the rule.² Still, however, studies on post-communist countries are rather rare.³ The conclusion is far from surprising if only we acknowledge the fact that we are dealing, respectively, with over 70-year and 25-year tradition of think tanks activities. Furthermore, one needs to consider that after the fall of communism and the break-up of the Soviet Union, the world turned away from Eastern Europe focusing on the war on terror, Muslim countries, conflicts in Africa and Middle East, and still rising importance of China. This is not to say the think tanks in post-communist countries throughout Eastern Europe are becoming less visible; on the contrary, one has to acknowledge their vital role in public sphere making them more and more like their older cousins in Western countries. Thus, we are inclined to treat thinks tanks as a “natural” phenomenon that is allegedly not worth studying. But is it really the case?

Poland and international events of the last several months are set as a context for the present research. Choosing Poland was decided not only by the virtue of its role as an example of relatively successful transformation from communism to democracy; indeed several other countries would also fulfill such a criterion: the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia or the Baltic states are just few relevant examples. The main reason for putting Polish think tanks in the center of analysis is their relative strength and performance. To prove the point, one may reach for one of the most recognized sources of comparing think tanks worldwide: “Global Go To Think Tank Index Report”.⁴ Its most recent version – released on January 22, 2015 – lists 85 think tanks from all around the world in “Foreign Policy and International Affairs Think Tanks” category. Polish Institute of International Affairs (Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, PISM) is 19th and that is the highest rank from all other Central / Eastern European think tanks included. Next in line is also Polish-based Centre for Eastern Studies (Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, OSW)
that is ranked relatively high (36th).\(^5\) This may serve as some indicator of the importance of the two think tanks in foreign policy arena.

The Ukrainian crisis seems to be self-evident as a case study if only one recalls the fact that we are dealing with the most severe international systemic crisis in Europe since the end of the Cold War. With the Russian Federation activities involved, it is claimed to surpass even the Balkan crisis of the 1990s.\(^6\)

\section*{POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND THE UKRAINIAN / CRIMEAN CRISIS}

The Polish Institute of International Affairs is a government-based think tank established by the Polish parliament in 1947.\(^7\) According to PISM’s official web site, its mission is to provide “advice to all branches of government and [it] contributes to wider debates on international relations in Europe and beyond. […] Situated in between the world of policy and independent expertise on international affairs, PISM promotes the flow of ideas that inform and enhance the foreign policy of Poland.”\(^8\)

Apart from four journals being regularly published, PISM also releases its Bulletin, Policy Papers, Reports, and Strategic Files. The below section of the paper reviews the sources in the following two clusters: (1) the PISM Bulletin and (2) other PISM reports.

\section*{THE PISM BULLETIN}

Since the paper deals with the Ukrainian / Crimean crisis, other topics in Polish-Ukrainian relations that are present in the bulletin were not covered here.\(^9\) The crisis has been present in the PISM “Bulletin” in various realms: from an early general assessment in December to the question of holding Ukraine’s former president, Victor Yanukovych, to account.\(^10\) Altogether – as of late January 2015 – we are left with 22 PISM “Bulletin” issues that are related to the crisis and it is far from surprising that majority of bulletins are devoted to security, political and economy issues.
The first category – security – is basically related to Russia’s military activities that are seen in a negative light: “Russian actions will have long-term negative consequences for European security. They also constitute a breach of the basic rules of international law. Apart from deciding on an immediate NATO response, allies should conduct an overall review of the relationship with Russia and Ukraine. They should also act resolutely to counter the Russian arguments about the legality of its deeds.”¹¹

The second aspect – political one – is also related to security but, however, one has a chance to look more broadly at the situation. The question of Crimean separatism and referendum serve the point. This time, PISM’s stance is again highly skeptical toward Russian aims: “The European Union cannot accept Russia’s argument that Russians in Crimea have a right to self-determination, as it would open the way to further Russian territorial claims against neighbouring countries.”¹²

The third category – economy – pertains mainly the question of Ukrainian energy supplies. This is important not only to Ukraine but also to other Russia’s customers – several EU countries with Germany, Italy, and Central European countries on the top of the list. Thus, the PISM’s stance seems to be more nuanced here since in one of the bulletins it calls for the EU to “support Ukraine extensively in improving energy demand-side management in relation to its economy as this influences Europe’s own energy security.”¹³

The argument for assistance in energy sector also includes the issue of modernization of Ukrainian gas industry, and “promoting alternative routes for the EU’s gas supplies.”¹⁴

Economy’s section importance is also underlined by paying attention to macroeconomic dilemmas and suggestion that “the EU and Poland should, therefore, use opportunity to enhance the scale of cooperation with the Ukrainian authorities, sharing experiences and best practices. It also should become involved in encouraging the Ukrainian government to move forward with long-term economic reforms.”¹⁵
Typically, in such a scenario, Poland was supposed to act “as a model of European reform to the east, and as promoter of Ukraine’s interests to the west.”

As may be seen from the above review, topics related to the EU-Ukrainian relations were not too often to be discussed: the wider European perspective is present only on two occasions: liberalization of the visa regime and the EU’s financial aid. This is consistent with rather literal understanding of the above mentioned statement on think tank’s mission: “PISM promotes the flow of ideas that inform and enhance the foreign policy of Poland.”

OTHER PISM REPORTS

Other kinds of PISM reports treat the Ukrainian crisis rather crisply. It does not, however, mean that they should be omitted. One of PISM’s Strategic Files is especially worth mentioning. The reason is that authors are trying to, interestingly, look at the crisis through analytical lenses and are suggesting several clusters of European countries with their approach toward events in Ukraine. As for Poland, it has been put – along with the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Lithuania – in a cluster named tellingly “Crusaders”. The above group of four post-communist countries is defined by having “a special stake in the future of Ukraine, be that for sociohistorical reasons or due to direct security-related interests emanating from a shared border with Ukraine. They (Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Lithuania) thus mix normative concerns with more direct material interests. All of these countries have some minority issues with Ukraine, whether because of a large Ukrainian diaspora living on their territories (the V4, particularly the Czech Republic) or their own ethnic minority groups living in Ukraine [Poland and Hungary]. These states thus have a tangible sense of the long term interests attached to Ukraine’s transformation.”

Furthermore, Poland is routinely envisaged as being kind of a bridge between the West and the East, by assisting the EU to take a more coherent position on the crisis.
Additionally, in one of the PISM’s briefing papers, its authors suggest seven recommendations aimed not only at Poland but at the EU as well. Interestingly, the briefing paper calls for a more decisive course of action, i.e. supplementing soft power activities with its hard counterparts – economic pressure (sanctions) to be imposed by the EU.

To sum up, PISM’s reports should be seen in accordance with official Polish activities toward Ukraine: a kind of a mixture of decisive and appeasement rhetoric. According to official elaborations, such a policy reflects well thought out and well balanced compromise between Polish wishes and possibilities of their fulfillment. On the other hand, critics easily question the issue of a coherence of such crafted foreign policy. PISM’s analysis rather falls into the first category.

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES AND THE UKRAINIAN / CRIMEAN CRISIS

The Centre for Eastern Studies is another example of well recognized Poland-based foreign policy think tanks. Interestingly, the OSW is also a government-based think tank. It was originally established in 1990 and it was given the present legal status by the Polish parliament in 2011. Think tank’s main publications include “Analyses”, “OSW Commentaries” and “OSW Studies” series. Having in mind OSW interest, its extensive coverage of the Ukrainian crisis is far from surprising: for the period late November 2013-late January 2015, the OSW released nearly 100 issues of “Analyses” on Ukraine exclusively. Their study reveals they are rather balanced, descriptive-oriented, with virtually no direct analysis and suggestions for the course of Polish foreign policy.

One of the most perplexing and arresting examples are two analyses released on March 19, 2014; both deal with Russian takeover of the Crimean Peninsula. The only perspective delivered is marked with consequences for Russia, Ukraine, and Crimea, whereas, no references to Poland – not to mention the EU – is striking.
Several other reports released earlier on March 5, 2014 investigate the impact of events in Crimea for Germany, the Baltic States, Turkey, and Central and South-Eastern European countries but still with no explicit analysis and suggestions towards Poland. Another example of this stark regional-focused approach is present in the most recent issues of “Analyses” where the current situation in Eastern Ukraine is put in the context of broader international consequences and not Polish government-addressed recommendations.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD PRIVATIZED FOREIGN POLICY?

The aim of the paper was mainly to investigate how the crisis was covered by two of the most recognized Polish think tanks active in foreign policy: The Polish Institute of International Affairs and The Centre for Eastern Studies.

Whereas the former seems to express its concerns / suggestions openly, the latter is more focused on regional – but not Polish exclusively – consequences, and its reports seem to be more nuanced. Thus only PISM’s coverage may be confronted with Polish government activities toward the crisis.

![Chart 1. Examples of public / private interests and actors: the case of Poland and the Ukrainian crisis.](chart.png)
It seems that the first of the government-based think tanks serves well its patron: PISM suggestions and point of view is highly coincident with official Polish declarations. On the other hand, the Centre for Eastern Studies acts in accordance with its mission and covers broader regional optics at the expense of exclusively Polish focus-on.

The above described activities of two Polish think tanks allows for acknowledging that their assertiveness may be explained by broader argument on civil society. Having stated the above, one may try to put the relevant activities in the following context. For the sake of the conceptualization of the issue, the below chart may be illustrative.

By putting think tanks activities in the above larger context of actors and their interests, the author does not pertain to any formal model or way of analysis. Thus, the reader is discouraged to interpret relevant blocks literally; for example, their size is not to suggest that business, market and trade-related issues were the prominent ones in Polish-Ukrainian mutual relations. The rationale is purely conceptual: by visualizing certain phenomena, one may rather easily acknowledge the fact that, notwithstanding they are government-based, the Polish Institute of International Affairs and The Centre for Eastern Studies may be considered as two examples of private (non-state) actors whose activities are aimed at causing public effects. This place envisaged for think tanks in the above chart seems to be critical since we deal with broader issue of privatizing foreign policy. The issue is of particular importance in empirical realm where the role of private actors in cases of presumably partisan consensus (such as foreign policy) is crucial for democratic performance and, on the other hand, foreign policy coherence.

The contextual embedding provided above may be useful for future investigations of any non-state (private) actors and their role in meeting public/private interests. Thinks tanks, public diplomacy efforts, direct investment options, business intelligence, rating agencies reports and private regulations are just few of examples that may indicate that empirical verification calls for some scrutiny.
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NOTES

1 An earlier version of this paper was prepared and accepted for the 56th International Studies Association Annual Convention, February 18–21, 2015, New Orleans, USA.


5 Another region-based thinks tanks being included are: Belgrade Center for Security Policy; Serbia (37), Center for Security and Defense Studies Foundation; Hungary (47), EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy; Czech Republic (56), Slovak Foreign Policy Association; Slovakia (57), Albanian Institute for International Studies; Albania (64), Institute for International Relations; Czech Republic (71), and Prague Security Studies Institute; Czech Republic (76).


7 The “government-based think tank” means, inter alia, that its director is nominated – and dismissed – by the Prime Minister.


9 The question of necessity of infrastructure improvements on the border is one of the examples. For further details see: Skorupska, A. Lessons from the EU’s Polish – Ukrainian Border: No Mobility without Infrastructure // Bulletin PISM, No. 142 (595), 23 December 2013. Available at: http://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=16009.


22 The briefing paper was released on March 14, 2014.

23 The OSW mission statement declares, inter alia, that think tank is engaged in “monitoring the events and analysing the socio-political and economic processes taking place in Russia, Germany, Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic states, the Visegrad Group states, the Balkan states and Turkey. The Centre also carries out regional research projects focused on security, integration of energy markets, migration and integration processes in Germany, Central Europe, the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Nordic-Baltic and the Black Sea regions.” Mission statement // OSW. Available at: http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/mission-statement. Accessed: 20 May 2014.

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UKRAINOS / KRYMO KRIZĖ IR JOS SUPRATIMAS LENKIJOS
„SMEGENŲ CENTRÜOSE“: VIŠĖJO / PRIVATAUS AKTORIAUS
KONCEPTUALIZACIJA UŽSIENIO POLITIKOJE

Santrauka

Diskutuojant apie neramumus Ukrainoje ir Kryme dažnai nurodoma, kad jie sietini kaip pagrindinę ir sisteminę visos Europos krizę, kuri tęsiasi dar nuo Šaltojo Karo. Manoma, kad šie, su Rusijos Federacijos veikla susiję, neramumai gali pranokti net 1990 m. Balkanų krizę. Taigi ekspertai, atsižvelgdami į dabartinės krizės svarbą, skatina imtis sąmoningų tyrimų ir pagrindinį dėmesį atkreipti į „trečiojo sektoriaus“ žaidėjus. Šis tyrimas apima vieną iš Ukrainos ir Rusijos kaimynų – Lenkiją.


Reikšminiai žodžiai: ekspertų grupė, Lenkija, užsienio politika, Ukraina, privatieji veiksniai.