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POLITICAL IMAGES AND PERCEPTIONS AT THE INTERDISCIPLINARY CROSSROADS
Introduction to the Special Issue "Ukraine—EU Relations: Verbal Narratives, Images, and Perceptions"

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Natalia Chaban, Svitlana Zhabotynska. Political images and perceptions at the interdisciplinary crossdoards. Introduction to the Special Issue "Ukraine—EU Relations: Verbal Narratives, Images, and Perceptions". This special issue presents findings of the transnational research project "Crisis, Conflict and Critical Diplomacy: EU Perceptions in Ukraine, Israel and Palestine" (C^3EU) (2015-2018) focusing on Ukraine-specific results [C^3EU, online]. Supported by the Erasmus+ of European Commission, C^3EU united experienced and early careers scholars into a research team of 36 who studied and facilitated best practice in EU perceptions research. The results of the project contributed to policy debates on EU global and regional governance and fostered academic-policy-makers' dialogues in Ukraine and the EU. Leading to this extensive outreach to the stakeholders, the C^3EU research consortium had consolidated academic excellence by gathering linguistic and non-linguistic information, and producing comprehensive and methodologically rigorous analyses of EU perceptions and narratives in Ukraine and Israel/Palestine reflecting major societal challenges. The articles published in this special issue focused on perceptions and images exposed in narratives on the EU, Ukraine and EU—Ukraine relations are interdisciplinary. They combine methodologies of cognitive and communicative linguistics with the findings of communication and media studies, cultural studies, political science, international relations, and European integration studies.

Key words: C^3EU, political images and perceptions, narratives, the EU, Ukraine, interdisciplinary research.

Наталія Чабан, Світлана Жаботинська. Політичні образи та сприйняття на міждисциплінарному перехресті. Вступ до тематичного випуску "Відносини між Україною та ЄС: вербальні наративи, образи та сприйняття". Цей тематичний випуск журналу містить доробок міжнародного дослідницького проекту "Криза, конфлікт та критична дипломатія: сприйняття Євросоюзу Україною та Ізраїлем / Палестиною" (C^3EU) (2015-2018) у частині, пов'язаною з Україною [C^3EU, online]. Проект C^3EU, підтриманий програмою Єврокомісії "Еразмус+", поєднав 36 досвідчених та молодих фахівців, які у своєму дослідженні послуговувалися сучасними досягненнями студій, присвячених сприйняттю ЄС. Результати проекту стали внеском у дебати стосовно участі ЄС у регуляції глобальних і локальних процесів та стимулювали науково обґрунтований діалог між політичними колами України та ЄС. Орієнтований на отримання конкретних практичних результатів, дослідницький колектив C^3EU намагався досягти академічної якості шляхом опрацювання мовних та позамовних даних за допомогою ретельно розробленого методологічного апарату, який дозволяє виявити особливості сприйняття ЄС в Україні та Ізраїлі / Палестині з урахуванням основних суспільних викликів сучасності. Статті, опубліковані в цьому тематичному номері, присвяченому сприйняттю та

образам ЄС, України та відносинам між ними, є міждисциплінарними. Воно поєднують методологічні положення когнітивної та комунікативної лінгвістики із положеннями комунікативних і медійних студій, культурології, політології, а також студій у галузях міжнародних відносин та європейської інтеграції.

Ключові слова: C^{3}EU, політичні образи та сприйняття, наративи, ЄС, Україна, міждисциплінарне дослідження.

Наталья Чабан, Светлана Жаботинская. Политические образы и восприятия на междисциплинарном перекрестке. Введение к тематическому выпуску "Отношения между Украиной и ЕС: вербальные нарративы, образы и восприятия". Этот тематический выпуск журнала представляет результаты международного исследовательского проекта "Кризис, конфликт и критическая дипломатия: восприятия Евросоюза Украиной и Израилем / Палестиной" (C^{3}EU) (2015-2018) в части, связанной с Украиной [C^{3}EU, online]. Проект C^{3}EU, поддержанный программой Еврокомиссии "Эразмус+", объединил 36 опытных и молодых специалистов, которые в своем исследовании руководствовались современными достижениями студий, посвященных восприятию ЕС. Результаты проекта стали вкладом в дебаты относительно участия ЕС в регуляции глобальных и локальных процессов, а также стимулировали научно обоснованный диалог между политическими кругами Украины и ЕС. Ориентированный на получение конкретных практических результатов, исследовательский коллектив C^{3}EU стремился достичь академического качества путем обработки языковых и неязыковых данных с помощью тщательно разработанного методологического аппарата, позволяющего выявить особенности восприятия ЕС в Украине и Израиле / Палестине с учетом основных общественных проблем современности. Статьи, опубликованные в этом тематическом выпуске, посвященном восприятиям и образам ЕС, Украины и отношений между ними, являются междисциплинарными. Они объединяют методологические положения когнитивной и коммуникативной лингвистики с положениями коммуникативных и медийных студий, культурологии, политологии, равно как и студий в области международных отношений и европейской интеграции.

Ключевые слова: C^{3}EU, политические образы и восприятия, нарративы, ЕС, Украина, междисциплинарные исследования.

1. Introduction

Ukraine post Maidan has become one of the major theatres of contention in Europe. Dramatic events of the Revolution of Dignity in 2013-2014 demonstrated to the world Ukraine's geopolitical choice to move closer to Europe. These events also opened a new uneasy chapter in the history of the country. Tragic deaths on Maidan, annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, unfolding of the Donbass war, downing of the passenger plane MH17 over Eastern Ukraine, and the most recent escalation of tensions in the Azov Sea followed. Simultaneously, Ukraine's economy and political system faced the urgent need to reform and modernise. These events and developments confronted regional and international security and stability and challenged the EU's leadership in the region and its foreign policy focus on the exercise of global political and economic stewardship. In this light, a mutual understanding with its neighbours is vital.

The Special Issue "Ukraine—EU relations: verbal narratives, images and perceptions" presents findings and methods of the transnational research project "Crisis, Conflict and Critical Diplomacy: EU Perceptions in Ukraine, Israel and Palestine" (C^{3}EU) (2015-2018) focusing on Ukraine-specific results [C^{3}EU, online]. Supported by the Erasmus+ of European Commission, C^{3}EU united experienced and early careers scholars into a research team of 36 who studied and facilitated best practice in EU perceptions research. The results of the project contributed to policy debates on EU global and regional governance and fostered academia-policy-makers dialogues in Ukraine and the EU. Leading to this extensive outreach to the stakeholders, the C^{3}EU research consortium had consolidated academic excellence by gathering information and producing comprehensive and methodologically rigorous analyses of EU perceptions and narratives in Ukraine and Israel/Palestine reflecting major societal challenges.

Perception, images and narratives on the EU, Ukraine and EU-Ukraine relations are the main themes of this Special Issue.

The C^3EU project focused on EU visions in a society traumatised by war and civil unrest and gathered comprehensive systematic data. Respectively, contributions to the Special Issue informed by findings, methods and theories of the project build and exchange knowledge across such issue-areas as perceptions of the EU, Ukraine and EU-Ukraine relations in the issue-areas of defence and security, economy, investment, business, research, innovation, culture, education, tourism, environment, climate change, migration, norms and values. Contributions to the Special Issue also position the EU in the broader narratives of Europe in Ukraine rooted in historical and cultural visions and examine how those views can be incorporated into successful EU-Ukraine relationship. The Special Issue also aims to facilitate a better understanding of EU global actorness – and specifically understanding of the EU as an effective actor in its Eastern neighbourhood. EU Global Strategy of 2016, the leading policy that guides EU external relations, prescribed a priority to the EU's relations with its neighbours to the East and South [EUGS 2016]. Yet, the EU is presently trialled by its own multiple crises. With both actors facing existential crises, our Special Issue presents a timely reflection on the role of perceptions and narratives in EU-Ukraine relations represented in different kinds of political and media discourses.

The story of Ukraine—EU relations may be told from different standpoints. For many scholars understanding of this relationship is ultimately about a story of power, geopolitical interests and conflict. Our Special Issue takes on board these considerations, yet proposes a different way to think about this relationship – through a range of meanings attached to it by actors inside Ukraine (decision-, policy- and opinion-makers as well as the media) and outside it. The latter perspective includes in this Volume views from Ukraine's neighbours to the West (the EU and its Member States) and to the East (Russia). This two-prong approach to the study of images and perceptions of EU-Ukraine relations is intentional. On the one hand, the insight into the domestic set of perceptions and narratives circulating in various discourses allows tracing Ukraine-specific "interface between the political fantasies of people, information flows, public reasoning and government policies" [Horbyk 2017: 25]. On the other hand, the insight into the external images and perceptions of EU-Ukraine relations – coming from the EU/EU Member States and Russia in our cases – opens an opportunity for comparison and thus a more comprehensive understanding how the meaning flows. After all, the images of "Europe" and Ukraine in it come to life through perpetual interactions with external "Others" – to the West and to the East of Ukraine.

2. Theoretical framework

The Special Issue recognises the need to understand interactions between Self and Other from a comprehensive theoretical position. Importantly, theoretical reflections on the Self-Other interactions have already informed existing research in the field of EU external perception (see [Chaban and Holland 2014; 2018]). This theoretical model – inspired by conceptualisation from social identity, cultural and communication studies – guides our Special Issue. This theoretical model takes a somewhat different take on Othering as understood by Hall [1997], who was focussing specifically on the racial difference. He explained the construction of difference through "the set of representational practices known as stereotyping" [p. 257], or making sense of the world through simplification, reduction and exaggeration of difference (see also [Horbyk 2017: 70]). Chaban and Holland [2014; 2018] instead put at the core of their model the concept of the *responsive Other* when considering the EU's external relations with actors around the world. With the concept of "Other" bringing into consideration "both those involved in the process of Othering as well as the object of this process" [Pickering 2001: 69], the notion of *responsive Other* also stresses on the agency of the Other. From this vantage point, images and perceptions

of EU-Ukraine relations existing inside and outside Ukraine feed into the reception and ultimately, actions towards each other. Founded on this theoretical premise, contributions to the Special Issue aspire to bear relevance to international relations. We carry a hope that results of our systematic multidisciplinary research into images and perceptions – and meanings forming them – will help the EU and Ukraine engage with each other in a respectful and understanding way, maximise reception of messages in key policy areas and ensure joint action for mutual benefit. Significantly, the notion of *responsive Other* is argued to be instrument in overcoming one of the main limitations of EU foreign policy scholarship – its Euro-centric character [Chaban and Holland 2018].

Theorisation of Self-Other interactions proposed by Chaban and Holland [2014; 2018] for the study of EU perceptions also argues "degrees and shades" of "Otherness" since identity is "dependent on the difference that has been translated into Otherness" [Pickering 2001: 49]. Respectively, contributions to the Special Issue reflect on the complexity of the "imaginary geography" of Ukraine. Is it seen to belong to the so-called "European" space? If yes, is Ukraine recognised as Eastern or Central Europe? Is it "European enough"? Or is it seen as a "backyard" of Russia, a natural part of the so called "Eurasia"? And what about the "shades of otherness" inside Ukraine divided by the ongoing conflict in the East? The imaginary geography is not only about Ukraine's actual place on the map – it is about adopting certain norms and values that the "space" is imagined to possess. In the Special Issue, we expect that images and perceptions of EU-Ukraine relations will be location-, cohort- and time-specific (see also [Chaban *et al*. 2013; Chaban and Magdalina 2014]). Depending on the vantage point, the meaning assigned to each other or the perceived relationship between the two in the areas of political, economic, social or normative exchanges will vary. Perceptions of the Other are also issue-specific: "the same external actor can see different 'shades' of the EU's 'Otherness' simultaneously – e.g. a promising trading partner, yet a distant normative reference and an inward-oriented political interlocutor" [Chaban and Holland 2018: 8].

The model by Chaban and Holland [2014; 2018] also proposes four possible outcomes of the interactions between Self and Other: 1) appreciation and respect of the Other; 2) positive and voluntary changes in the Self's identity due to the respect and appreciation of the Other; 3) the negation of the Other; and 4) an active rejection and consolidation of the self-views against the Other. The four outcomes stem from the scholarship of intersubjectivity. According to Peeren and Horskotte [2007: 11], interactions between the Self and the Other may lead to either a "productive reformulation of identity and a generous, respectful relation to alterity … [or] … a negating reaction or a rigid entrenchment of the self". Contributions to the Special Issue demonstrate how meanings of EU-Ukraine relations – explicated through images and perceptions in various discourses – are distributed between the four options. The meanings are expected to be different between "those who fought for [Europe], for those who fought against it, and for those who watched from afar with either compassion or indifference" [Horbyk 2017: 29].

The final premise of the theory of Othering is that interaction between Self and Other is a powerful instrument that "may help each participant to learn more about themselves" [Chaban and Holland 2018: 8]. With both the EU and Ukraine facing existential crises of a political, socio-economic and security nature, a systematic account of mutual perceptions of EU-Ukraine relations present an opportunity to revisit their own self-images and self-narratives and to overcome their own limitations. Finally, Chaban and Holland [2014: 14] argued that the views of the Other are revealing about the Self: simply, "[A] systematic and comprehensive account of how various global actors view the EU will inform the EU about those actors at a more subtle 'first-hand' level". The same true for the EU's partners, including Ukraine. The EU's (or Russia's) images of Ukraine reveal the actor's own primary concerns. What the EU (or Russia) imagine about Ukraine reveals what these actors themselves care about the most.

The Othering model is instrumental to understanding what kind of Other the EU and Ukraine are for each other. This is especially useful at critical times. Contributions to the Special Issue will explore how the actors inside and outside Ukraine recognise and appreciate each other – whether they see each other worthy of engagement in policy dialogues and influential enough to evoke changes among the receivers' identities. Contributions also pinpoint the ways in which images and perceptions tell us a story of negative attitudes and rejection.

3. Research design and choices

The Special Issue draws on the expertise of meaning and perceptions research, utilising existing academic connections, successful structures, tested methods and innovative theoretical models. Importantly, our focus on meaning in our understanding of Ukraine—EU relations prescribes a close attention to language (words and visual images) and representations through language. According to Stuart Hall [1997: 22], "representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people". Hall also postulates that the "meaning is constructed at the moment of both its expression and reception, enabling in this way a multitude of possible understandings and negotiated uses of text" [Hall 1980/2001 cited in Horbyk 2017: 36-37]. A similar notion of formulation/projection and reception of the narratives in international relations appears later in the strategic narrative theory [Miskimmon *et al*. 2013]. Guided by these understandings and by the theory of Self-Other interactions in the field of perceptions studies discussed above, contributions to the Special Issue are necessarily multi- and inter-disciplinary. They engage with theories, concepts and/or methods that relate to the scholarship of text and discourse in a broad sense and thus build bridges across several disciplines – cognitive and communicative linguistics, communication and media studies, cultural studies, political science, international relations, and European integration studies.

Reflective of this multidisciplinary setting, the Special Issue also engages with a diverse pool of empirical evidence. It considers Hall's encoding/decoding scheme [1986/2001] that calls to account for the construction of meaning both as expression and reception. Several contributions analyse official discourses and policy documents that formulate and project official positions of actors. In addition, several articles explore meanings communicated by influential news media. Such media are credited with ability to create a shared space for meaning circulation in a given society and thus impact public's imagination about external relations and foreign policy choices. Reflecting on the changing media landscape, contributions also explore Internet and social media productions. Other contributions undertake analysis of the texts of interviews with policy-, decision- and opinion-makers. Analysis of their views dispositions is critical when researching meanings on EU-Ukraine relations circulating inside and outside Ukraine. The individuals in these positions – sometimes called "elites" – are argued to be "transnational moral entrepreneurs" who are required to "mobilise popular opinion and political support both within their country and abroad", "stimulate and assist in the creation of likeminded organisations in other countries", and "play a significant role in elevating their objectives beyond its identification with the national interests of their government" [Nadelmann 1990: 482].

Multiple sources of data mean that the authors are employing a range of methods for data collection and analysis. Many contributions employ a mixed-method approach, combining rich qualitative interpretive analysis weaving into it techniques of quantitative analysis. Qualitative methods aim at identifying leading themes of EU-Ukraine relations within political, socio-economic, cultural, historical and normative contexts and discourses. These methods are of special value when nuances in meaning formation and circulation are of paramount importance. Quantitative methods assist with detecting more general patterns and dynamic regularities of the findings, especially when a study deals with voluminous samples.

Robust multi-disciplinary setting of the Special Issue leads to multiple theories, sources of empirical evidence and methods show-cased in each contribution. The multiple perspectives

provide readers with references to cross-check the meanings and engage with comparisons thus warranting the validity and reliability of research findings presented. Validity and reliability are further enhanced by the comparative approach undertaken by contributors – across sources of evidence, locations and time periods. This is in addition to comparisons between internal (domestic to Ukraine) and external (outside of Ukraine) meanings.

4. Structure of the Special Issue

The external perception of Ukraine—EU relations is represented by three perspectives: those of the EU, Germany and Russia.

The EU perception of its relations with Ukraine is discussed in the article *"Constructing bridges and fostering growth: Interdisciplinary insights into European Union role conceptions and prescriptions"* by Natalia Chaban (University of Canterbury, New Zealand) and Ole Elgström (Lund University, Sweden). In their focus are official EU discourses, namely texts of EU Global Strategy (June 2016) and the Official Memorandum of the EU Summit on the Eastern Partnership (EaP) (November 2017), as well as texts of 12 interviews with EU practitioners dealing with Ukraine (conducted in Brussels in 2017 within the C3EU framework). The authors test a novel theoretical synergy. They link a leading cognitive science theory of conceptual metaphor [Lakoff and Johnson 1980] to a role theory [Harnisch *et al.* 2011; Holsti 1970] well-established in international relations scholarship. The developed theoretical framework is applied to investigate the EU's role conceptions and projections towards its Eastern Neighbourhood, and Ukraine specifically. Using the tool of conceptual metaphor, the authors systemically explore the EU's role conception (self-image) as well as its perception and expectations of the Eastern Partnership (role prescriptions).

The article also analyses cognitive and emotive elements in the EU's foreign policy roles. Therefore, the methodological innovation based on the notion of conceptual metaphors reveals fundamental cognitive and emotional traits central to the roles played by actors.

The perceptions of Ukraine—EU relations by Germany and Russia as the two major players in European politics are studied in the article *"Frames and Images Facing Ukraine: Comparing Germany's and Russia's Media Perceptions of EU Relations with Ukraine"* by Katharina Kleinschnitger, Michèle Knodt (both of TU Darmstadt, Germany) and Nadiya Safonova (Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada). Germany and Russia are the members of the conflict negotiation quartet within the Minsk Format. For both, Ukraine is a key geopolitical interlocutor in Europe. The article explores the framing of Ukraine—EU relations by the leading German and Russian newspapers that reported the EU—EaP summits in a historical period between 2009 and 2015. The Summit of 2009 initiated implementation of the EaP policy, and the Summit of 2015 responded to Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. While the leaders of the EU (including Germany) and Ukraine have committed to deepening political association and economic integration of Ukraine with the EU, Ukraine's close ties with Russia appear to be waning, and Russia's resistance to Ukraine's *rapprochement* with the EU is growing. The authors, who employ the cascading activation framing theory [Entman 2003, 2004] popular in media and communication studies, consider the concept of framing and propose an innovative method that operationalizes this concept. The analysis of empirical data draws contrasting pictures. Within the same observation period, interactions between the EU and Ukraine are framed in much more cooperative terms in the German press, while the Russian media, perhaps predictably, creates and disseminates an increasingly negative and conflicted frame over time.

The other contributions to this Special Issue explore internal perceptions of Ukraine—EU relations exposed in different kinds of texts: official documents of the Ukrainian government, interviews with representatives of Ukrainian elites, publications of Ukrainian influential newspapers and web-based media, as well as small stories written by Ukrainian Facebook users. These diverse sources of data enable exposure of stances taken by different societal groups – the Ukrainian

authorities, the leaders of particular societal domains, the newspaper makers who shape public opinion, and the public *per se*. In the articles of this Special Issue, perceptions of Ukraine—EU relations existing in a particular societal group are considered either as coherent system or as a particular aspect of such a system.

In the article *"Constructing a narrative of European Integration in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine: A Corpus-Based Discourse Analysis"* Hanna Kryvenko (Kyiv National Linguistics University, Ukraine) turns to the analysis the official website of the Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada). Guided by the assumption that social transformations constitute and are constituted by discourse, the author maitains that discursive construction of European integration is an essential part of public policy making as well as shaping socially shared knowledge and attitudes in Ukraine. At the same time, European integration as a discursive construct is subject to modification in the course of time and / or in different settings of institutional communication. The article has two objectives: to reveal how consistently European integration has been constructed in discursive practices of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in the 21st century, and to contribute to elaboration of a corpus-based methodology applicable for analyzing discourses of social change over time in the Ukrainian language. A combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches is employed to treat the data coming from an *ad hoc* built electronic corpus of the texts published on the official website of the Verkhovna Rada between 2002 and 2017. The findings include patterns of naming and reference to European integration as well as the distribution and dynamics of their usage within the observed period. The exposed modifications in the discursive construction of European integration are interpreted with respect to a wider socio-political context.

The article by Alister Miskimmon (Queen's University, Belfast, UK) and Ben O'Loughlin (Royal Holloway, University of London, UK) *"An EU recovery programme for Ukraine? Towards a new narrative for EU—Ukraine relations?"* address a rising need for a clearer articulation of EU-Ukraine relations in general, and of EU economic aid to Ukraine in particular. They do so by exploring perceptions and narratives among Ukrainian elites: politicians, business leaders, media professionals, civil society and cultural leaders (data gathered in 50 semi-structured key informant interviews conducted in 2016-2017 within the C3EU framework). The authors propose an innovative synergy of the strategic narrative theory [Miskimmon *et al*. 2013] and the agent-transformation theory, thus creating a novel conceptual template to understand generation and reception of the narratives when society faces a major change. In particular, the article dissects the narrative of the EU's 'Marshal Plan' for Ukraine circulating among Ukrainian decision- and policy-makers, and explore the myths devoid of details and historical memory. The myth is defined following Levi-Strauss' [1955: 430-431] seminal definition which underlines the importance of language: myth "is language, functioning on an especially high level where meaning succeeds practically at 'taking off' from the linguistic ground on which it keeps rolling". The authors also follow Barthes' [2009: 169] premise for whom "myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they once were made". Ultimately, the authors question the value of a vision: does is serve to inspire or mislead in the age of low trust in leaders, experts and institutions to guide change to the collective benefit? They argue that in transformational projects (and Ukraine is one of those), it is important first to act according to a general principle, and then build a strategic narrative to legitimize that action later.

Perceptions of Ukrainian elites are again in focus in the contribution by Yevheniia Hobova (A.Yu. Krymskyi Institute of Oriental Studies, Ukranian Academy of Sciences, Ukraine). Her article *"East-West dichotomy in the context of Ukrainian conflict resolution"* analyses EU perceptions among Ukrainian representative of five decision-making cohorts (political, business, media, cultural and leader spheres). Adding to the multidisciplinary thrust of the Special Issue, Hobova engages with the cultural studies hypothesis of orientalism [Said 1978], as well as the concept of cultural geography of "imaginary borders". Specifically, she explores cognitive mapping of the world within the coordinates of East *vs*. West from the Ukrainian perspective. The article

employs Said's prediction that a Western knowledge of the Eastern world inevitably carries a negative connotation – a vision that interprets Othering as the process of "ascribing a rigid, reified and essentialised identity to the East, both idealised and demonised" [Horbyk 2017: 69, elaborating Said's argument]. The author uses this hypothesis to test the existence of contrasting images of the West and the East in the conflict narrative among Ukrainian elites. The study inquiries: Where is the line that divides these "spaces"? What countries constitute the "East"? What countries typically represent the "West"?; and finally, How does the Russia-Ukraine conflict affect the perceived division? The article also hypothesizes that an internalized 'othering' may be present within Ukraine's borders (due to the ongoing conflict in the East). However, the findings disprove this prediction. Interviewees demonstrated preference for peaceful resolution of the conflict and showed no prejudice or 'othering' of Eastern and/or Western regions. Other results show that Ukrainian elites share a sense of closeness with Eastern European countries due to historical and cultural ties as well as modern day partnership. Relations with Russia are seen in ambiguous terms despite the armed conflict in the East and the annexation of Crimea.

In the article by Viktor Velivchenko (Bohdan Khmelnitsky National University of Cherkasy, Ukraine / University of Canterbury, New Zealand) "*Donbas crisis key actors: narratives and perceptions in the interviews of Ukrainian elites*", the empirical data, collected in the course of the C^{3}EU project in 2016-17, comes from 40 elite interviews with political, business, civil society and cultural leaders of Ukraine. Adding to the strategic narrative theorisation, the article considers intersections between the concept of narrative used in international relations studies, in linguistics and semiotics. The article positions Ukrainian elite at the overlap of two narrative projections – the internal one (Ukraine's 'European choice') and external ones, concerned with the EU (including the Normative Power Europe narrative). The analysis of elite perceptions of Ukraine's dyadic interactions, with the EU / EU member states, the US and Russia as the key actors in the Donbas crisis, aims to expose the constructed images of these actors. Methodologically, the article studies the interview texts with a three step protocol: 1) identification of denotational and connotational meanings of relevant words; 2) analysis of sentences in terms of direct and indirect (metaphoric) meanings with positive or negative assessments; and 3) propositional content-analysis. The results spell the need for a more nuanced understanding of Ukraine's perceptions of the respective key actors involved in the ongoing conflict, as well as understanding the origin of these perceptions, which is beneficial for the EU's critical diplomacy towards Ukraine.

The articles that consider portraying of Ukraine—EU relations in different kinds of media integrate the linguistic findings of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory [Lakoff and Johnson 1980] with the contribution of other theories developed inside and outside linguistics.

In the article "*Images of Ukraine—EU relations in conceptual metaphors of Ukrainian mass media"* Svitlana Zhabotynska (Bohdan Khmelnitsky National University of Cherkasy, Ukraine) explicates a coherent system of conceptual metaphors used to describe Ukraine—EU relations. The conceptual metaphors are reconstructed via analysis of metaphorical expressions employed by eight influential Ukrainian newspapers across political continuum: *Holos Ukrainy, Uriadovyi Kurier, Den', Dzerkalo Tyzhnya, Gazeta Po-Ukrains'ky, Segodnya, Ukraina Moloda,* and *Kommmentarii* observed in January-June, 2016. The study is detailing the metaphorical categorizations that serve to describe two key issue-areas of Ukraine—EU relations – those of politics and economy. The author show-cases the original innovative methodology intended for exposure and characterization of conceptual metaphors inferred from multiple linguistic data [Zhabotynska 2016]. Based on the conceptual metaphor theory [Lakoff and Johnson 1980], the proposed methodology represents an algorithm for processing multiple metaphorical expressions used in a thematically coherent discourse. Application of this algorithm allows to grasp the totality of metaphorical images of the EU, Ukraine and their relations, enables an in-depth study of the target and source conceptual domains, and a thorough account of their cross-mapping influenced by the discourse type. The reconstructed system of conceptual metaphors exposes Ukraine's stance on its relations with the EU, and the workings of conceptual metaphors as instruments for exerting influence on the public.

The conceptual metaphor theory also informs contribution by Olena Morozova (V. Karazin Kharkiv National University) "*The influence of context on the metaphoric framing of the European Union in Ukrainian mass media"*. In it, the author takes a somewhat different route to the article by Zhabotynska and shows how conceptual metaphors used to describe the EU by Ukrainian print media (the data collected from the eight newspapers observed in the C^{3}EU project) can impose a narrative structure on the perception of this domain. Theoretical innovation of the article lies in the synergy between conceptual metaphor theory [Lakoff and Johnson 1980] and discourse metaphor theory [Cameron and Deignan 2006; Semino 2008; Musolff 2006; 2007]. The study argues that specificity of the use of metaphors in Ukrainian mass media suggests preference for specific socio-cultural values and may even include contrastive conceptualizations.

5. Conclusions

Contributions to the Special Issue aim to demonstrate nuanced mechanisms behind meanings of EU-Ukraine relations circulated in different discourses inside and outside Ukraine. They explore how certain images and perceptions of EU-Ukraine relations capture imagination of differing target groups and ask what they may mean for Ukraine and the EU, now and in the future. Findings demonstrate differing perceptions among target elite audiences and media discourses inside and outside Ukraine. Factoring these nuanced findings, contributions outline conditions for local (Ukrainian) partners to become more open to cooperation with the EU. They map topics relevant for the location in crisis where the EU could exercise the most impact; and identify regional *vs*. global trends and opportunities for the EU's leadership to reconceptualise its critical diplomacy and revisit the EU's image and credibility in Ukraine.

Ultimately, the Special Issue invites scholars who study images and narratives in international relations; EU global actorness, governance and leadership; European Neighbourhood Policy; and conflict, as well as media, cognitive and image studies to engage with perceptions research in a cross-sectoral, multidisciplinary and transnational setting. The *multidisciplinary reflections* are they key to facilitate an understanding of the EU's changing international role and foreign policy challenges in its immediate geo-political region. Multidsciplinarity is also the pathway to identify what can influence behaviour and attitudes amongst key audiences and serve as a reference for future EU policies towards Ukraine.

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