

YANUKOVYCH'S DECISION TO POSTPONE THE SIGNATURE OF THE AGREEMENT WITH THE EU: A POLIHEURISTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

President Yanukovich's decision to postpone the signing of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the European Union triggered a strong reaction in Ukrainian society. One of the consequences of the crisis that ensued was the removal of the president himself. What prompted Yanukovich to postpone the signing of the agreement with the European Union?

In seeking the answer to this guiding question, poliheuristic theory was used, in the light of which this decision process was analysed in two stages. The first stage identified that the option not to be selected was the signature of the agreement with the EU, and the threats that internally led to this decision were analysed. Yanukovich felt that his survival in power was not at issue and sought to solve Ukraine's immediate financial problem by highlighting the problems that industrialists in the south-east of the country were experiencing with Russian trade blockades and avoiding essential structural reforms in the country.

Although the decision was already identified, we analysed how it maximized the advantages and minimized the disadvantages, which corresponded to the second stage of the analysis.

Dismissing the civic and political mobilization of the Ukrainians, believing he could have talks with the European Union and Russia concomitantly and valuing the immediate financing needs, answers the question initially posed, that is, what prompted Yanukovich to postpone the signing of the agreement.

Keywords

Ukraine; Russia; European Union; Poliheuristic Theory; Financing

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Introduction

In the light of Poliheuristic Theory (PH), this reflection aims to analyse the decision of the Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych in November 2013 to postpone the signing of the Association Agreement (AA) and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the European Union (EU).

Both agreements resulted from a rapprochement between Ukraine and the EU, which began in 1998. With the AA, the EU wanted a political association with Ukraine, as well as to promote the highest possible level of economic integration (EU, External Action, 2013). As regards the DCFTA, the objective was to establish a free trade area that would allow Ukrainian access to the European market (estimated at 500 million consumers and 17.6 billion USD), as well as increased foreign investment in the country (Nupi Institute, 2013).

At the same time, Yanukovych expected Russian pressure against this rapprochement with the EU. In July 2013, Russia imposed restrictions on Ukrainian imports, which although not official², had a significant impact on Ukraine's exports (Cenusa et al., 2014, pp. 1-3). Attempts to negotiate the price of gas were not accepted by the Kremlin, which translated into a burden for Ukrainians. Russian President Vladimir Putin considers Ukraine a state that is naturally under Russian influence and should be part of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), a customs union that encompasses Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

After the announcement that Yanukovych would postpone signing the agreement, thousands of Ukrainians demonstrated in Kiev, demanding the rapprochement of their country with the EU. The police charge on the demonstrators was strong, resulting in dozens of deaths and hundreds of injured, as well as a strengthening of the protesters' willingness to continue their protests, which eventually spread to other Ukrainian cities.

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² The Russian authorities argued that Ukrainian products did not comply with their national regulations in the case of agri-food products and were technically flawed in the case of railway carriages.



As such, in view of the importance of this event, it is important to analyse the Ukrainian President's decision and try to answer the question: What prompted Yanukovych to postpone the signing of the agreement with the European Union?

The first part of this paper presents the theoretical framework that underpins the analysis, PH Theory, more concretely the two stages that characterize it and its corresponding dimensions. It is followed by a brief economic and political overview of Ukraine, which supports the analysis. The third part examines the foreign policy decision episode that led to the crisis and consequent Yanukovych's removal.

It should be noted that this work is based essentially on the analysis of official documents concerning international institutions' resolutions and communiqués and electoral and economic data; of scientific papers on the Ukrainian crisis, as well as news published by various media. The fact that it was not possible to interview former President Yanukovych or any of his closest collaborators specifically on this decision is a limitation in the context of this reflection.

Finally, the main conclusions of this study are presented, namely the answer to the question initially posed and that guided this reflection.

Poliheuristic Theory

History is replete with decisions of political leaders that determined its course, as they affect the balance in international relations. In this context, there are several models that are a reference to be used in the analysis of the decision-making process in international relations. PH theory is one of them. As the etymology of the word poliheuristic indicates ("poly" means many and "heuristics" means shortcuts), it is a process that simplifies decision-making through several "shortcuts" (Mintz et al., 1997, p.554).

In the light of PH theory, the decision-making process consists of two stages, in which the first one identifies the possible options and eliminates the options that do not meet the non-compensatory principle. According to this principle, the options under analysis are evaluated by the decision-maker in several dimensions, although only one of them is considered to be the most important. If the evaluation shows that in this primordial dimension the option is not strong or even impracticable, the evaluation in the other dimensions, even if very favourable, does not make this result worth it and the option is not selected for the next step (Redd & Mintz, 2013).

Within the options that go through to the second phase, the one that best maximizes the advantages and minimizes the disadvantages, the result of being rationally compared³, is selected (Redd & Mintz, 2013).

When making foreign policy decisions, leaders cannot be aware of only the external aspects of that decision. The internal context, although not the background, plays a very important role in the first stage of the process, since national interests have to be met, as well as the political interests of the leader or his/her regime. Therefore, in the first

³ In the study of the decision-making process in international relations, there are two approaches to consider: the cognitive and the rational. In the first, the focus is on the process itself, seconding the result to be achieved. To this effect, knowledge, judgment, beliefs, among other characteristics or tools of the decision-maker are fundamental. In the rational approach, the focus is on the results that are intended to be achieved, using a comparison between the options. The latter aims to ensure the selection of the option that best meets one's needs or objectives (Brulé, 2008).



stage, where the process aims to identify which options do not comply with the non-compensatory principle, the following threats are taken into account: the survival of the political leader or even of the regime itself; the loss of popular support associated with the political decision in question; decrease in popularity; chances of electoral defeat; rising internal opposition; political fragmentation of the leader's supporters or within his/her party; internal or external challenges to the regime; collapse of the government or coalition; legitimacy, power and political credibility of the leader; demonstrations and social contestation; parliamentary vetoes (Mintz, 2004, pp.6-9).

In the second stage of the analysis in the light of PH theory, the selected options are evaluated from a foreign policy perspective, in their economic and diplomatic aspects, seeking to maximize their advantages and to minimize their disadvantages (Breuning, 2007, pp.65-67).

Although PH theory has already been used to analyse several decisions in international relations⁴, and evidence has been obtained that corroborate it through several methods (Mintz, 2005) and (Brulé, 2008), some limitations have been identified.

According to Stern (2004), there are limitations in PH theory, since how the leader perceives the problem and conceptualizes it, and how the issues to be decided are detected and reach the decision-maker have not been analysed; the same applying to a set of contextual factors that condition the leader's action in the internal context, such as the political situation at the time (for example, the proximity of elections or results obtained recently can condition the degree of freedom in the leader's decision) or his/her political autonomy.

Stern (2004) points out another limitation in the use of this theory, which is that the analysis is static and pertains to a particular moment, when the leader can change the contours of the decision, for example when manipulating public opinion or a certain elite, or when gathering more political support, changing the internal constraints that affect his/her decision-making.

Yanukovych's decision in the light of the Poliheuristic Theory

a. Economic and political context of Ukraine

In order to better understand the analysis of Yanukovych's decision to postpone the signing of the agreement with the EU, it is appropriate to make a brief overview of the economic and political situation in Ukraine at the time.

Of the states that made up the former Soviet Union, Ukraine had the second largest economy, with agriculture and heavy industry playing a central role. After its independence in 1991, the opening of the Ukrainian economy began and a set of reforms were initiated. However, progress was limited as a result of its own internal resistance and the large size of the parallel economy. Many structural changes have yet to be made, in terms of capital markets, legislation and the fight against corruption (CIA, 2016).

⁴ The decisions of American President Eisenhower in the crises of Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam and Guatemala in 1954; of President Clinton regarding the crisis in Kosovo in 1998 (Mintz, 2004, p. 5) or the Swedish participation in Operation Unified Protector (Nilsson, 2016) are some of the examples of the application of this theory.



Yanukovich was elected in 2010, having won the second round of the election with 49% of the votes, against 45.5% of his opponent Yulia Tymoshenko (Election Resources on the Internet, not dated.). These election results, in addition to reflecting a small margin between the two candidates' votes, are extremely heterogeneous if one considers the results in the various Ukrainian regions. Their analysis reveals that in the north and west of the country, the electorate strongly supported Tymoshenko, in sharp contrast to the east and south regions, where Yanukovich's support was larger.

Figure 1 – Results of the Presidential Elections in Ukraine in 2010



Source: <http://www.polgeonow.com/2014/03/ukraine-divisions-election-language.html>

It was precisely in the southern and eastern regions that most of the Ukrainian oligarchs were concentrated, with whom Yanukovich maintained a highly dependent relationship. This group was responsible for a large part of the country's wealth creation, in several areas, which gave them power regarding the President. The President, in turn, was in power and stayed there thanks to this group's support (Matuszak, 2012).

Russia was Ukraine's main trade partner, where, in 2012, it exported 25.67% of its total exports and from where it imported 32.39% of total imports⁵ (WITS, 2016). Regarding energy, the Ukrainian economy was also heavily weakened by its high energy dependence on abroad: about 75% of its oil and gas needs and 100% nuclear fuel are imported (CIA, 2016).

In economic terms, the situation was quite fragile: since mid-2012 the economy had been in recession, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had contracted by 1.3% from January to September 2013 and in the former twelve months the current account deficit had been 8% of the GDP. Until December 2012, the country had had a programme of assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) underway. However, negotiations to establish a new programme had not yet been successful as the IMF insisted on

⁵ In 2012, Ukrainian exports and imports to and from other countries were well below the level of transactions with Russia: Exports - Turkey (5.36%), Egypt (4.22%), Poland (3.75%) and Italy (3.61%); Imports - China (9.33%), Germany (8.04%), Belarus (5.99%) and Poland (4.21%) (WITS, 2016).



assurances that proposals for measures and reforms suggested to the Ukrainian authorities would take place (IMF, 2014).

Whereas in economic terms the Ukrainian reality was not favourable, in political terms it was not either. Since his election in 2010 that Yanukovich had been basing his power on three pillars: fear, apathy of the Ukrainian people and wealthy supporters (Mycio, 2013). Fear, according to Mytius (2013), was secured through control of the courts, the police and parliament, with the arrest of his political opponent Tymoshenko being an example of this. In the eyes of the international community, freedom of the press⁶, as well as Ukrainian democracy⁷ were being undermined by Yanukovich's rule.

After this brief outline of Ukraine's economic and political situation, we examine Yanukovich's decision, which was carried out in two stages.

b. First stage

In the first stage, the options Yanukovich had before him - signing the agreement with the EU or accepting the Kremlin's proposals - were evaluated. In the light of the theory, the option that does not respect the non-compensatory principle is removed. In this context, it is considered that the primordial dimension was Yanukovich's maintenance in power. Such consideration is due to the fact that politicians very rarely choose an option that politically harms them (Mintz quoted in Breuning, 2007, p.66) and also to Yanukovich's actions to weaken the opposition, namely the arrest of Tymoshenko and other politicians and to find short-term economic and financial solutions that would strengthen his acceptance by the electorate (Kropatcheva, 2014, p.13).

The agreement option with the EU focused above all on the political rapprochement between the EU and Ukraine and would lead to the economic integration of this country into the European area. However, this agreement contained a number of reforms that Ukraine had to comply with for the process to continue, approved by the Council of the European Union on 10 December 2012 (European Commission, 2012). The commitment to implement these reforms was taken up by Yanukovich in the joint statement made at the conclusion of the 16th EU-Ukraine Summit (EU, 2013).

These reforms covered three areas: the adoption of a reliable electoral system, due to the shortcomings observed in the October 2012 legislative elections; solving the issue of "selective justice"⁸ and avoiding its recurrence⁹; and the specific reforms defined in the Association Programme (European Commission, 2012).

The other option was the Kremlin's proposals to keep Ukraine in the Russian sphere of influence, reinforcing Ukraine's economic and energy dependence and investing on Ukrainian future integration in the EAEU.

⁶ In 2013, Ukraine fell from 116th place to 126th in the Freedom of the Press Index (RSF, 2103).

⁷ In 2013, Ukrainian democracy was considered to be Hybrid by the Economist and Freedom House, with the democracy index attributed by both to Ukraine being degraded since 2010 (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2013) and (Freedom House, 2013).

⁸ "Selective justice" means political convictions of members of the opposition in cases that were not fair, transparent and independent in the light of international norms (European Commission, 2012).

⁹ To this end, the EU considered that all the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights should be implemented, as well as the recommendations of the Council of Europe on conditions of detention and medical care in this context (European Commission, 2012).



In this first stage of the analysis process there were internal constraints¹⁰ on the table, such as the possibility of threat to the survival of the political leader or even the regime itself; loss of popular support associated with the political decision under analysis; decreasing popularity; prospect of electoral defeat; increased internal opposition; political fragmentation of the leader's supporters or within his party; internal or external challenge to the regime; collapse of the government or coalition; threat to the leader's legitimacy, power and political credibility; demonstrations and social protest, and parliamentary vetoes.

As far as the leader's survival was concerned, it is unequivocal that Yanukovych wanted to remain in power until guaranteeing his re-election in 2015, although he knew that he needed to ensure the country's financial sustainability (Klitschko, 2013). In the short term, there was the debt that Ukraine had to honour to Russia and for which the EU did not provide a solution. According to the media (RFE/RL, 2013), the EU was willing to make available 838 million USD to Ukraine, which was clearly insufficient for immediate Ukrainian needs.

In the long-term horizon, the reforms to be carried out in Ukraine, as agreed with the EU, were still to be completed, falling short of what had been assumed (European Commission, 2013). For Kropatcheva (2014, p. 4), the Ukrainian government implemented the reforms selectively, and achieved only those that did not challenge the power of the ruling elite. As noted earlier, the IMF also called for reforms so that a new assistance programme could be negotiated. The possibility of the IMF not developing a new programme would lead to a worsening of the economic recession and financial fragility, as well as to the monetary devaluation of the hryvnia (Kuzio, 2013).

The investment needed for these reforms would be large and in the short term the Ukrainian economy could be affected, for example, unemployment would be expected to rise (Motyl, 2013). It was precisely the reforms that were still to be implemented that Yanukovych pointed out as the cause for postponing the signing of the Agreement, alleging that Ukraine did not yet meet the necessary conditions (KyivPost, 2013).

In addition to the financial requirements, the pre-election conditions were not favourable to the Ukrainian President¹¹. Since his election in 2010, Yanukovych tried to establish an authoritarian regime¹², based on personal connections and a predominance of the executive power over the legislative and judicial powers. This was not fully achieved thanks to the lack of public support and the efforts of the opposition (Sushko & Prystayko, 2014, p.651).

The maintenance of Yanukovych in power would be difficult due to the absence of charisma, ideology and material resources that make authoritarianism possible (Motyl, 2013).

The President considered the opposition, especially former Prime Minister Tymoshenko, a threat to his re-election, because a significant part, mainly young people and students, followed the pro-European orientation of his opponent (Kuzio, 2013). Yanukovych's

¹⁰ These internal constraints, identified by Mintz (2004), are unacceptable from the political point of view, that is, if they happen, they necessarily lead to the exclusion of the corresponding option.

¹¹ According to the polls, in February 2010, 28% of Ukrainians did not approve the governance of Yanukovych and in March 2013 that figure had already risen to 53% (Razumkov Centre quot. Kropatcheva, 2014).

¹² This model was supported by the amendment to the Constitution made in September 2010, when the Constitutional Court considered that the 2004 amendments had been unconstitutional, restoring the President's powers that existed before the Orange Revolution (Havrylyshyn, 2017, p.145).



strong hand with the opposition that allowed the arrest of his political opponents was also questioned by the signing of the agreement with the EU. Immediately after Tymoshenko was sentenced, the European Parliament, in its resolution of 27 October 2011, strongly criticized this and other legal proceedings, considering them to have been conducted outside European and United Nations standards and that they represented an abuse of judiciary power, in clear disrespect for human rights (European Parliament, 2011). Paragraph 7 of this resolution states that

"if Yulia Tymoshenko's conviction is not reviewed, the conclusion of the AA and its ratification will be compromised, further alienating the country from its European perspective" (European Parliament, 2011).

This European requirement was maintained and at the EU-Ukraine Summit in February 2013, it was pointed out as one of the obligatory actions to be taken by Ukraine, with concrete progress, so that the signing of the agreement was possible (EU, External Action, 2013).

Regarding internal political support, both within the Party of Regions and its supporters, it was expected that the reaction to the signing of the agreement with the EU would be one of displeasure. As a result, in addition to withdrawing their support for Yanukovych, they were expected to get closer to the Communist Party (Motyl, 2013).

Yanukovych's supporters included the Ukrainian oligarchs¹³, who were not indifferent to the decision that had to be made. The agreement with the EU represented Ukraine's entry into the European market, i.e. access to a market with around 500 million consumers and estimated at 17.6 billion USD (Nupi Institute, 2013). On the other hand, the rapprochement with Moscow was a relief for the country's south-western industry, which was paralyzed by the Russian blockade (Kuzio, 2013), combined with financial aid, gas price renegotiation and possible membership of the EAEU.

The position of the oligarchs on this matter, especially of those who had connection with Yanukovych and the Party of Regions was not clear. Whereas the protection of the internal market and the maintenance of its *status quo* were relevant to some of these oligarchs, who were not at all interested in introducing free and fair competition in the Ukrainian market, for others the opening up to foreign markets was quite important (Matuszak, 2012, pp.63-66).

Some oligarchs had interests in Europe, including in some European stock exchanges, investments and real estate, and did not want relations with European partners to deteriorate. The same could be said for Russia, given Russia's importance as a business partner. However, it should be noted that the EAEU's conditions were not favourable to the Ukrainian oligarchs, who would incur high tariffs on their exports (Matuszak, 2012, pp.66-71).

¹³ Present in the main economic sectors: Metallurgical, Media, Banking, Machinery Production, Food and Agricultural, Chemical, Transportation, Insurance, and Energy, among others (Matuszak, 2012, p. 8).



In view of these ambiguous positions regarding the rapprochement with the EU or Russia, one can only identify the interest of Ukrainian oligarchs in the prosperity of their business, and their association with any of the options is not direct (Matuszak, 2012, pp.71-73).

The internal opposition to Yanukovych, particularly the Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform, saw the agreement with the EU as a historic opportunity to improve the lives of Ukrainians as well as those of future generations (Klitschko, 2013). The Fatherland Party coalition considered the agreement with the EU an opportunity to improve freedom of expression and alleviate oppression in Ukraine (Kuzio, 2013).

With regard to popular support for Yanukovych, it was not homogenous throughout the country. The civic and political mobilization of Ukrainian society in the south-eastern regions, supportive of the President, was not as strong as in the rest of the country (Motyl, 2013), but Yanukovych did not consider it to be relevant. The President believed that the Ukrainians were disillusioned and apathetic about politics, thanks to cases of corruption and political intrigues that often took place after the Orange Revolution (Mycio, 2013).

Consequently, the threat to his survival that the demonstrations and social contestations represented, after the postponement of the signing of the agreement with the EU, were not anticipated by Yanukovych.

As for to threats that the government or coalition could collapse; to the legitimacy, political power and credibility of the leader and parliamentary vetoes, no evidence has been found that Yanukovych took them into account, for which reason they were not considered in this reflection. We only know that, as mentioned earlier, the intense contestation that the population expressed shortly after the signing of the agreement was postponed was not expected. The collapse of the government, as well as the leader's loss of legitimacy, political power and credibility, could only have been regarded as very improbable by Yanukovych. This is the only reason why the President opted to postpone signing the agreement, since these threats undermined his survival in power, which was essential for him, as already demonstrated.

In short, Yanukovych yielded to Russian pressures and chose the signature of the agreement with the EU as the option not to consider. This choice was based on the fact that Yanukovych felt that his survival in power was not endangered and that this decision would increase his chances of re-election in 2015. He focused his concerns on solving Ukraine's immediate financial problems and those that industrialists in the eastern part of the country were experiencing with the Russian trade blockades.

c. Second stage

According to PH theory, in the second stage of the process, the option that the leader will choose is selected based on the maximization of the advantages and minimization of the disadvantages. In the case under consideration, the exclusion of the signature of the agreement with the EU has already been considered, leaving only the option of getting closer to Russia. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to analyse how Yanukovych will have evaluated the latter, in terms of maximizing the advantages and minimizing the disadvantages.



When Yanukovych postponed the signing of the agreement with the EU, he stated that his country had no conditions at that time to take on the compromise, emphasizing his intention to do so in future. The emphasis was placed on the assistance that Ukraine needed to meet these conditions, and the EU was a key player in this process. That is to say, Yanukovych did not cancel the agreement, only postponed it, because he did not intend to distance himself from the EU, he only tried to find another solution for his immediate financing problem. One of the advantages of this decision was to keep the rapprochement with Europe open, as outlined in his speech (KyivPost, 2013).

About two weeks after the summit in Vilnius, Yanukovych agreed with Putin an immediate loan of 15 billion USD; he renegotiated the gas price, valid from 1 January 2015 until 2019, with the price of one thousand cubic metres dropping from over 400 USD to 268.5 USD¹⁴; and he obtained assurances from the Kremlin about the end of blockades on Ukrainian exports (RFE/RL, 2013). With these results, Yanukovych solved his immediate financial problem, his decision representing a clear economic advantage.

However, Ukraine's financial fragility was not only evident in the short term, since it was necessary to secure long-term financing, which was essential to bring about the reforms the country needed. Although the option selected was getting closer to Russia, this should be only partial, since Yanukovych did not want Ukraine's accession to the EAEU, contrary to the Kremlin's intentions, as the long-term solution (Pawlak & Croft, 2013), which was a strong disadvantage of this option.

Right in the speech in which he announced that he would postpone signing the agreement, Yanukovych tried to minimize this disadvantage. To this end, he proposed holding talks between Ukraine, the EU and Russia to try to resolve the imminent economic collapse of his country and urged the EU to help Ukraine obtain financial assistance from the IMF (KyivPost, 2013).

The Ukrainian President wanted to maintain a balance between Russia and Europe, although sooner or later he would have to make a choice. Both actors would demand it and Yanukovych would make the choice that offered more guarantees of his re-election in 2015 (Kuzio, 2013).

However, the EU rejected the Ukrainian proposal, claiming that there had to be a commitment on Ukraine's part that it would sign the agreement (Pawlak & Croft, 2013). For Kropatcheva (2014), the signing of the agreement was used by the EU as a soft power instrument, but ineffectively. On the one hand, the signing of the agreement had become a matter of 'now or never', quite politicized, and a geopolitical game with Russia, pushing the actual reforms into second place. On the other hand, the EU did not have solutions that would enable Ukraine to carry out the reforms under difficult economic conditions, or even to support further reforms after the signing of the agreement. In other words, the EU's position was weak and inconsistent in the long term (Kropatcheva, 2014, pp.8-9).

The pressure exerted by these actors, notably the EU when it refused the proposed talks, certainly took place earlier than Yanukovych had in mind and it was a clear signal that

¹⁴ The impact of this renegotiation on the Ukrainian economy was considerable given the high dependence on natural gas (accounting for about 40% of energy consumption). Of the natural gas consumed in Ukraine, 60% is supplied by Russia. In 2013 alone, it is estimated that this supply accounted for about 10 billion USD (Chow & Ladislav, 2014).



the balance that he intended was not going to be possible, which nullified one of the advantages that the Ukrainian President wanted to achieve with his decision¹⁵.

In short, it can be said that the main advantages of the decision to move closer to Russia and to postpone signing the agreement with the EU were to secure the short-term financing of the Ukrainian economy, the end of the Russian trade blockade and the renegotiation of the gas price, which was a life-saver for an economy whose collapse was imminent.

The disadvantages of this decision were primarily due to the absence of a solution for the long-term financing, which Yanukovych sought to minimize with his negotiating proposal to the EU.

Conclusions

The Ukrainian President's decision to postpone signing the agreement with the EU in November 2013 not only surprised his European counterparts, but also Ukrainian society itself. Faced with this decision, the Ukrainians took to the streets and mass demonstrations, to which the authorities responded with violence. The events took such a proportion that Yanukovych was eventually removed from the presidency of Ukraine.

This reflection sought to answer the question that was raised at the time: what prompted Yanukovych to postpone the signing of the agreement with the European Union?

The answer points to the conclusion that Yanukovych wanted, above all, to remain in power and create the conditions to be re-elected in 2015. To this end, he tried to secure short-term financing from Russia and in the long term from the EU.

This need for funding was decisive, since the country's economic and financial situation was quite delicate and Yanukovych's retention in power depended on finding a solution for it.

According to PH theory, in the light of which this reflection was made, in the first stage it was identified that, for Yanukovych, the fundamental dimension of this decision-making process was his maintenance in power. Therefore, the fact that short-term funding was not ensured by the agreement with the EU and the required reforms, especially the end of so-called "selective justice", considered to be a threat to the continued presence of the President in power, led to the exclusion of this option.

Getting closer to the Kremlin solved the need for short-term financing, in addition to ending the Russian economic blockade and enabling renegotiating the gas price. However, Yanukovych did not consider this option to be the complete solution for all the problems. Long-term financing, with the inherent adherence to the EAEU, was one of the disadvantages of this option. When Yanukovych postponed the signing of the agreement with the EU, he immediately tried to minimize this disadvantage by proposing talks between the EU, Russia and Ukraine in order to obtain continued financial assistance from the IMF.

¹⁵ In an attempt to overcome this obstacle, Yanukovych attempted to minimize his dependence on Russia by getting closer to China in order to establish a new trade co-operation agreement (Polityuk & Balmforth, 2013) and hence secure long-term financing for his country.



By choosing the option that allowed him to stay in power and trying to minimize its disadvantages and maximize its advantages, Yanukovych tried to get the best of both worlds with Europe and Russia.

As events have proved, this decision was not successful: Yanukovych erred in assuming that he would continue to negotiate with the EU and Russia concomitantly and underestimated the Ukrainian society's ability to contest.

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