

THE IMPACT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE ON POLISH-UKRAINIAN ECONOMIC RELATIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ILLUSION OF EXPLANATORY DEPTH

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Abstract

The article explores the impact of the war in Ukraine on Polish-Ukrainian economic relations through the lens of the illusion of explanatory depth. It delves into the complexities and nuances of the economic ties between the two countries in the context of the ongoing conflict, shedding light on the potential consequences and challenges that have arisen. In order to analyse the matter in question, authors do research on the historical background, modern tendencies of the economic relations through social media and interviews with respondents from the field of Polish-Ukrainian relations. The significance of this paper is based on the current happenings, influence of war on the economic relations between these two countries and the rapid challenges and changes that these relations are experiencing.

Keywords: Polish-Ukrainian economic relations, illusion of explanatory depth.

Introduction

The illusion of explanatory depth refers to the mistaken belief that one fully comprehends causal relationships, when in reality, this understanding is often superficial. This concept is particularly relevant to the economic relations between Poland and Ukraine, as the abundance of information and propaganda from various sources can confuse public opinion. Despite their shared history, the onset of the war in Ukraine marked a new chapter in their relationship, characterized by a common identity and shared values. To truly understand complex issues such as the conflict in Ukraine, individuals must delve deeper into the available information rather than relying on surface-level understanding

Today, discussions about the war in Ukraine permeate scientific conferences, news articles, and social media platforms, opening up political and diplomatic discourse to the public. However, the effectiveness of propaganda persists, exploiting the illusion of explanatory depth to manipulate public opinion. Without a comprehensive understanding of the economic, political, and historical contexts, the electorate is susceptible to manipulation, potentially leading to internal conflicts based on social and cultural differences.

In researching this topic, the authors engaged with economists, students, and businesspeople to gain diverse perspectives. They found that individuals with similar backgrounds tended to share similar opinions, highlighting the influence of education and experience. For instance, economists from Poland and Ukraine typically hold comparable views on the subject. Conversely, those lacking expertise and relying solely on social media may have drastically different viewpoints.

1. Overview of Polish-Ukrainian Economic Relations

Ukraine and Poland have been partner countries since Kyiv declared its independence. In 1992, the two nations signed a bilateral agreement on "good neighborliness, friendly relations, and cooperation".¹

¹ Zakon rada, "Договірні-правова база між Україною та Польщею" 1992.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 resulted in massive civilian casualties and infrastructure destruction. This forced people to flee their homes in search of safety, protection, and assistance. Poland became a refuge for millions of refugees, with over 10 million Ukrainians arriving in the first months of the war. Approximately 1.6 million chose to stay, adding to the 1.5 million Ukrainians already residing there.²

Throughout the full-scale war, Poland emerged as one of Ukraine's closest allies. It holds the position of being Ukraine's second-largest trading partner and export market globally.

	Exports (\$,billions)	Import (\$, billions)
2018	3,2	3,6
2019	3,3	4,1
2020	3,3	4,1
2021	5,2	4,9
2022	6,7	5,5

Poland benefits from a strategic economic partnership with Ukraine, as from the beginning of the full-scale war in 2022 to the end of May 2023, the country imported approximately EUR 8.2 billion and exported almost EUR 14 billion to Ukraine, which corresponds to one third of the European Union's exports and is 2.5 times higher than Germany's, said Janusz Wojciechowski, European Commissioner for Agriculture.³

Among the European countries hosting Ukrainians, Poland spent the most money - more than 12 billion euros.⁴

The largest volumes of cash were withdrawn in Poland and the largest volumes of transactions in retail chains using Ukrainian cards were also made in Poland (28% of the total). Other sources of expenditures by Ukrainians abroad were cash taken out of Ukraine, government support programs, and labor income in the host countries.

At the end of 2023, Ukrainians spent 11.7 billion zlotys in Poland, which is equal to UAH 97.3 billion.⁵

According to Professor Maciej Duszczyk of the Center for Migration Studies at Warsaw University, Poland has no right to complain that helping Ukrainians is costing the country dearly. "We have spent 3.5 billion zlotys (\$750 million) to help Ukrainians, but the calculations of Bartosz Marchuk, vice president of the Polish Development Fund, show that we have received 10 billion zlotys (\$2.4 billion) from the taxes they paid," he said. Thus, since the beginning of the full-scale war, Ukrainians have brought Poland three times more taxes than the country spends on refugees.⁶

The influx of migrants from Ukraine was the main driver of the acceleration of retail sales in Poland in March, offsetting the negative impact of inflation and deteriorating consumer sentiment on household spending.⁷

Most Poles were involved in helping war refugees, who were immediately granted citizenship-like status with full access to healthcare and education. Poland has also provided Ukraine with important weapons-including howitzers, tanks, and even airplanes-worth more than \$3 billion: 320 Soviet-era tanks and 14 MiG-29 fighter jets, and now has no more to offer, as Poland's military equipment has

² UNHCR, "Ukraine Situation: Response Snapshot - As of January 2022".

³ Wojcicki, J., Twitter post. 2022.

⁴ Ministry of Regional Development, Construction and Housing of Ukraine. 2023.

⁵ Statistics Poland. 2023.

⁶ Ukrainian World Congress (n.d.).

⁷ Credit Agricole. 2022.

been depleted by about a third through transfers to Ukraine, and Warsaw is now replacing it with modern Western-made equipment. Arms exports to Ukraine will not stop completely.⁸

The amount of military aid provided to Ukraine is tracked by the Kiel Institute, the current data includes donations until the end of October (data from January 19, 2024, next update is planned for February 16, 2024).⁹

	Volume in euros (Rank in the recipient country ranking)	% of GDP (Rank in the ranking of recipient countries)
General obligations	4.341 billion euros (Rank: 7)	0.675% of GDP (Rank: 6)
Humanitarian obligations	0.347 billion euros (Rank: 11)	0.054% of GDP (Rank: 11)
Financial obligations	0.959 billion euros (Rank: 8)	0.149% of GDP (Rank: 4)
Military obligations	3.036 billion euros (Rank: 6)	0.472% of GDP (Rank: 8)

In fall of 2023, relations began to deteriorate. Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary announced restrictions on imports of Ukrainian grain.¹⁰ The dispute between the governments arose because Ukrainian grain, as Polish farmers complained, flooded the market and lowered prices for domestic suppliers. Then, in September, the Polish government ignored the European Commission's call to lift the embargo imposed by Warsaw on grain imports. At the end of September 2023, Ukraine filed lawsuits with the World Trade Organization against three countries over the bans, which it said were a violation of international obligations.¹¹ "The embargo on Ukrainian agricultural products will have to be lifted. It has calmed the situation on the Polish market to some extent, but it was not well received politically. The European Commission and Ukraine are protesting," - said Czeslaw Sekerski, Minister of Agriculture. The European Commission has rejected Poland's proposal to reintroduce duties on agricultural exports from Ukraine. The minister noted that other ideas are being discussed, such as licensing of products coming to Poland.¹²

The anti-Ukrainian protests in Poland have spread to the transportation sector, with truck drivers blocking checkpoints and demanding the return of a system of limited licenses for Ukrainian trucks. Before the war, there was a permit system for drivers, with Poland and Ukraine receiving equal shares. After Russia invaded Ukraine, the EU suspended this permit system to help Ukraine keep its economy afloat. Because Poland is Ukraine's main link to Europe, the number of Ukrainian trucks has increased dramatically. Protesters limited the number of trucks that could cross the border. Military and humanitarian aid was allowed through, while the rest had to wait. The queue of Ukrainian trucks reached a distance of more than 20 miles. On December 11, 2023, Polish farmers stopped blocking one of the Yahodyn checkpoints for a week. On January 16, 2024, Polish carriers completed the blocking of the border in front of the Krakivets and Rava-Ruska checkpoints. Subsequently, traffic was unblocked in front of the Yagodyn and Shehini checkpoints. Registration and crossing of trucks in both directions is carried out as usual. This was reported by the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine.¹³

The border blockade poses a serious problem for Ukraine's international trade, as land routes are often the only viable means of transportation for the country.

⁸BBC. "Ukraine conflict: Russia warns of 'full-scale hostilities' in east." <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66873495>. [L. s. 03.04.2022].

⁹ Kiel Institute for the World Economy (n.d.).

¹⁰ Reuters. 2023.

¹¹BBC. "Ukraine crisis: Russia announces 'partial withdrawal' of troops." <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66849185>. [L. s. 06.04.2023].

¹² Business Insider. 2022.

¹³ State Border Guard Service of Ukraine (n.d.).

Polish law allowed all Ukrainian citizens who arrived in the country after February 24, 2022, and were granted temporary protection status to open and run businesses on an equal footing with Polish citizens. This was the main factor that contributed to the growth in the number of Ukrainian businesses. In January 2022, before the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian citizens opened 188 businesses in Poland, and as of June 2023, 29.4 thousand Ukrainian sole proprietors (analogous to Ukrainian individual entrepreneurs) were registered in Poland according to the CEIDG database.

Most of the businesses started by Ukrainians, more than 23%, are construction companies. 18% of Ukrainian companies operate in the information and communications sector, and 14% in other services. Among the services, 85% provide hairdressing and cosmetic services. The majority of construction companies perform finishing works (29%) and construction works related to the construction of buildings (18%). They account for 25 percent of all companies with foreign capital in Poland. Most of them are trading companies (22%), construction companies (19%) and companies engaged in transportation and warehousing (14%), according to the PIE report based on CEIDG data.¹⁴

The pace of establishment of Ukrainian companies in Poland is not slowing down, companies are being established, operating and are likely to operate in the territory of the Republic of Poland, thus contributing to the increase in state budget revenues.¹⁵

On January 18, the Polish government issued a special law on the extension of temporary protection certificates: "Persons who have received a temporary protection certificate from the Office for Foreigners with an expiry date of March 4, 2023, September 4, 2023 or March 4, 2024 do not have to apply for new documents. These certificates will be valid until March 4, 2025".¹⁶

It turned out that this refers to the extension of residence permits for third-country nationals who legally resided in Ukraine until February 24, 2022, fleeing the war. "Citizens of Ukraine who received temporary protection in Poland on the basis of the Special Act of March 12, 2022, i.e. received a PESEL number with the status of UKR, as of January 18, 2024, may stay in Poland on the basis of this status until March 4, 2024," the Ministry's website states. Along with the expiration of temporary protection for Ukrainian refugees, the opportunity to start a sole proprietorship on an equal footing with Polish citizens also ends.

At the same time, according to the Polish newspaper Dziennik Gazeta Prawna, the government is working to extend the period of protection for Ukrainian refugees.¹⁷

Poland and Ukraine need a reset that would restore their former strategic closeness - but this cannot happen without a breakthrough at the highest political level.

2. The Impact of War in Ukraine on the Economic Relations

The authors believe that it is the phenomenon of the illusion of explanatory depth that is relevant for the chosen topic. The illusion of explanatory depth reflects a discrepancy between surface familiarity and true comprehension. People often overestimate their understanding of everyday objects, systems, or concepts because they mistake their ability to recognize them with a deeper understanding of their workings. If a respondent is asked how well he or she knows how the kettle, computer, headphones or any other products from the daily activities work, the answer is considered to be a yes. However, if the following question would be about getting deeper into the knowledge of processes of work of those, specifics and characteristics, that may cause a very big shift and difference in the answers. Similarly, in fields like economics or politics, people may hold strong opinions on complex issues without fully understanding the underlying factors at play.

After the war started, the Polish-Ukrainian border witnessed significant activity in the context of grain trade and transportation. One situation that commonly arises involves the transit of Ukrainian grain

¹⁴ PIE. 2023.

¹⁵ Kaass.pl (n.d.).

¹⁶ Government of Poland. 2024.

¹⁷ Gazeta Prawna (n.d.).

through Poland to reach markets in the European Union and beyond. Due to infrastructure limitations and logistical challenges within Ukraine, the most efficient route for exporting this grain often involves crossing through Poland. The Polish-Ukrainian border serves as a critical transit point for this trade, with truckloads of grain crossing daily.

In recent weeks, the agricultural community in Poland has been rocked by a series of protests led by farmers expressing discontent over the influx of Ukrainian grain into the country. These protests highlight growing concerns within the Polish farming sector regarding the impact of foreign grain imports on domestic agriculture.

To analyze the topic deeper, the main points of why Polish farmers protest should be defined. The first one is a market distortion: the influx of Ukrainian grain which is cheaper than Polish has led to unfair competition, driving down prices for domestically produced grain and squeezing profit margins for Polish farmers. The following one is an effect on the livelihood: for many small-scale farmers, who form the backbone of Poland's agricultural sector, the increased competition from Ukrainian imports poses a threat to their livelihoods. They argue that they cannot compete with the economies of scale and lower production costs enjoyed by Ukrainian agribusinesses.

The situation on the border has really escalated the situation between economic relations between Poland and Ukraine. Authors believe that the phenomenon of illusion of explanatory depth is quite relevant in the discussion and description of this topic in context of succumbing to propaganda.

As Ukrainians living in Poland, the authors were able to analyze and observe the difference in opinion between Poles and Ukrainians on this issue. As a base, research and analysis of the social networks was done (comments, posts, etc.). Also, interviews with the experts from the field were conducted – it is shared below.

So, when it comes to the main messages in the social media, Ukrainians expressed their opinions and indignation because of the lack of the Ukrainian demonstrations at the border where Polish farmers hold their strikes. The propaganda worked well, and there also were comments claiming that gatherings on February 24 are not important if the organizers of these same gatherings do not organize the protests on the border. In terms of scale and power of the demonstrations, on February 24, more than 20 000 people came out in Warsaw, capital of Poland.

From the diplomatic point of view, there is an opinion that for Ukrainians not to have protests at the border was the right decision, since it should be regulated by governments, not the electorate.

Relations between Poland and Ukraine are very important nowadays, and the task of the Ukrainian state, as well as Polish, is to quickly react to situations like it. Why is it so important to understand that this issue should be resolved at the state level? Poland and Ukraine built their relationship as nations after the start of the war: incredible support both socially and economically. Human relationships and values are a very important factor in this matter. Strong messages on the social media: “Ukrainians are ungrateful – we helped them, and this is what we got,”; “Stop Ukrainization of Poland”; “Poland for Poles”, etc. On another hand there are: “Poles forgot that Ukraine stands for Europe”; “The real opinion of Poles is to scatter the grain and block the borders”. Unfortunately, propaganda has become quite successful on the Internet with this matter. It is important to understand that this is also an example of the illusion of explanatory depth. This phenomenon explains that a person bases the opinion solely on what is stated to be true by others – in this case, propaganda. He or she does not have sufficiently deep knowledge on this issue and bases his or her opinion on what propaganda offers, although with the highest probability, he or she looks at the situation superficially, without analyzing all the data and variables.

As a part of the empirical research for this article, the authors interviewed a lecturer, member at the Department of Economics in Kozminski University and an expert in the Macroeconomic Team at Polish Economic Institute, Sergiej Druchyn.

The discussion was related to the economic relations between Polish and Ukraine. “Economic relations between Poland and Ukraine after the start of the war improved. This is expressed in an increase in trade volumes, huge amounts of support from both refugees from Ukraine and from part of

the Ukrainian business, which also moved to the Polish market. The Polish government has created many simplified rules for Ukrainian employees and so that Ukrainians can open a business in Poland and legalize their economic activities. At the same time, of course, one cannot miss the fact of a certain, so to speak, trade war between Poland and Ukraine, which, in principle, begins in half of 2023. The reason was that the transit of grain, which was supposed to be exported to the rest of Europe, remained in Poland, which is why Polish farmers expressed their dissatisfaction. Clearly, this situation does not have a positive impact on trade and economic relations between Poland and Ukraine, however, this crisis should be managed in the near future – tools are already being developed to overcome this. Otherwise, Poland is one of the main contenders for the reconstruction of Ukraine. And also, on the Ukrainian side, many simplifications have been introduced for Poles, thanks to which opening and running a business in Ukraine seems to be a very easy procedure – Poles can do business in Ukraine on almost the same basis as citizens of Ukraine.”

Authors also talked to a volunteer and a member of Reconstruction of Ukraine Club at Warsaw School of Economics, Eduarda Kornienko: “Before the war, relations between Ukraine and Poland were quite strained - the main reason for this was the historical context and the fact that politicians did not search for or did not find a common vector of development, a common narrative that would spread among both nations.

In Ukraine, during the term of President Yushchenko, who was very open to foreign politics, there were attempts to reach an agreement, but they did not reach a common denominator to improve economic relations and take it to another level. Poland and Ukraine are two democratic countries, our government is the people. Some time before the war, when Mr Zelensky was already the president, a communication appeared in the mass media claiming that we would finally be officially friendly countries, since the president of Ukraine, Vladymyr Zelensky met with the president of Poland, Andrzej Duda, and discussed cooperation plans, as we already know, Russian aggression. We saw photos of our presidents spending time together in a friendly atmosphere somewhere in Poland - this is where the light of these relationships was revealed.

The war begins, in the first days the Polish authorities do not react particularly actively, but people... And we get back again to the topic of nations - people reacted immediately, the focus of attention quickly shifted from past historical factors, and it turned out that we are closer to each other than we thought.

Poles became a shoulder of support for Ukrainians when the war that started on February 24, 2022 started. Despite the broadcasted propaganda and whatever it says, Ukrainians incredibly appreciated it, appreciate it and will always appreciate it. It is like "love at first sight", based on hurting showing that we have a lot in common, and many things unite us. If earlier we talked about the difference in languages and mentalities, it became the other way around - Poles who started literally taking Ukrainians to their homes began to understand that we actually have common values, and this will bring us closer together. Poles are still very much interested in Ukraine, Ukrainians are interested in Poland - of course, one of the reasons is that there are millions of Ukrainians living in Poland at the moment. The narrative that Ukraine protects the whole of Europe, including Poland, was needed - it helped and possibly pushed Poles to show more support especially during the beginning of the war. This led to the fact that the authorities quickly began to react, help and entice other countries to do the same. It is also worth noting that Poland supports Ukraine in the matter of promotion to the EU. But I would like to note that starting from "emotional hugs", these relations have now become more economic, where both parties think about their domestic politics, but at the same time know that there is a country nearby with which there is now a strong enough connection - both emotional and economic.

Interest in the war decreased. What really surprises me, by the way: in Poland, for example, people are still very much interested. Sure thing, one of the reasons is the fact that there are so many Ukrainians, and we are colleagues, friends, couples. At some point, the Polish authorities seem to have changed the focus of attention and focused on domestic politics - elections are coming. Then, Mr Muravetsky decides that the issue of Ukrainian grain needs to be reviewed. When the war began, there was an agreement on the emotional background that there would be transit for grain. But, in the

spring of 2023, the Polish authorities decided that this is not beneficial for domestic politics. The transit of grain is prohibited, despite the fact that Volodymyr Zelensky had a meeting with Polish representatives just a short time before that. The grain, by the way, is still standing on the border - since I often drive through Helm, I see these wagons standing there. The EU does not fully understand how to react to this due to the specifics of international law.

At the same time, it is necessary to remember that the Russian agency works – propaganda with the budget of a lot of money is in action, and it does it very well. The authorities are confused and quite limited in their actions – the elections are coming soon. The law does not prohibit peaceful protests, so farmers on the border stay.

I want to summarize by saying that economic relations between Poland and Ukraine will develop. This open border is very important for Ukraine, but in the same way, if you look at Poland's economy, by blocking the border the Poles are blocking themselves. A good moment was chosen: the war in Ukraine, the internal elections in Poland - an excellent moment for propaganda that aims to divide people. The destabilization happened indeed, but reasonable people understand it all.”

Conclusion

To conclude, this topic is considered to be extremely relevant both for Polish and Ukrainian sides. Economic relations of Poland and Ukraine have undergone a transformation after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, currently experiencing a challenge of the propaganda focused on setting Poles and Ukrainians against each other. Both these nations sociologically have a high respect and dedication to the fact of belonging to their nation, and this is what fuels the effectiveness of propaganda.

To summarize, the illusion of explanatory depth is an assumption that one perfectly understands cause and relationships, while in reality, it is far from the case. Authors claim that it is important and interlinked with the topic of economic relation between Poland and Ukraine, because propaganda from different parties and the amount of the information has its role in terms of confusing opinions of people.

Poland and Ukraine had their history which had its story, but when the war in Ukraine started, the brand-new page of relations began. What unites Poland and Ukraine is the united people and values of the nation. Ukrainians truly value that they are Ukrainians; Poles truly value they are from Poland.

So, the illusion of explanatory depth is the concept which lies in the idea that one has to dig into the information more in order to claim the level of knowledge on a certain question. Nowadays, the topic about war in Ukraine is discussed during the scientific conferences, and becomes a topic for articles, news, etc. Politics and diplomacy are more open to society than it was before because of the social networks. So why does the propaganda work so well? Authors claim that the illusion of explanatory depth is a powerful perspective for exploring this topic.

Without proper information about the backgrounds such as economic, political, historical and others, the opinion of the electorate can be easily manipulated and cause inner conflicts on the social and cultural base.

While working on this article, in order to have a big picture on the topic, authors talked to economists, students, people from business, etc. and it turns out that people with the same background have more similar opinions. For example, an economist from Poland and an economist from Ukraine would have similar opinions on this topic. At the same time, a Ukrainian and a Pole who do not have any background in the matter and base their opinion on what is presented in the social media, would have two completely different viewpoints.

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