Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University College London
Unit of Assessment: 27 – Area Studies
Title of case study: The limits of European integration in Eastern Europe: Impacts on policy and practice

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Research by Dr Andrew Wilson underpinned the development of policy planning and advocacy which shaped European Union (EU) policy towards Russia and the six countries of the Eastern Partnership. The recommendation to send high level policy advisors to Moldova, based on Wilson's research, was adopted by the EU's Eastern Partnership in 2009. Wilson's research and policy recommendations also underpinned the EU's response to a 2010 crackdown in Belarus and to worsening relations with Ukraine in 2011–12. Finally, Wilson's research on democracy in post-Soviet countries led the election monitors of the OSCE to reshape their monitoring strategy in Ukraine.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Dr Andrew Wilson's 2005 book *Virtual Politics* ([a] in section 3) analysed the sophisticated techniques of the post-Soviet 'political technology' industry for constructing façade democracies to fool both domestic and international audiences. Revealing the key 'tricks of the trade' made it easier for analysts and observers to spot corruption and lack of real reform behind the façade. Political technologies used to 'construct politics' include the abuse of administrative resources, disguising a party's or politician's true nature by creating virtual brands, media manipulation, construction of political parties, destruction of political opponents, the framing of campaign dynamics and the manipulation of election results. Virtual politics is thus *'the way that elites seek to manage, manipulate and contain democracy'* in the run up to elections and on election day.

Further research applied these findings to Russia. In 2008 Wilson showed that the original assumption about Russia held by many scholars and commentators that the newly elected president, Dmitry Medvedev, was a 'more democratic' replacement for Putin was deeply flawed [b]. Moreover, with local leaders only paying lip-service to 'European values', he argued that the EU's policy of 'enlargement-lite' lacked real pulling power to transform Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus [c].

Wilson expanded this thesis and its geographical coverage with his examination of Ukraine [f]. In 2013, he used it to outline two scenarios for Ukraine: one of collapse or popular protests, and a second, more realistic scenario, that Ukraine will remain difficult to change [e]. Similarly, his study of Belarus [d], attributed the longevity of President Aliaksandr Lukashenka to skilful manipulation of both internal and foreign policy, despite human rights abuses and involvement in a series of rigged elections.

Wilson's key, much-cited policy-oriented work on the six 'Eastern Partnership' States (the states bordering Russia and the expanded EU) argued that the EU needed to rethink its approach to the six countries or face a ring of failing states and an increasingly active Russia rebuilding its sphere of influence [c].

Wilson joined the School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies at UCL as a Lecturer in 1996, then became Senior Lecturer, and since 2008 has been Reader in Ukrainian Studies.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[a] Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). Available on request.

[b] *Meeting Medvedev: The Politics of the Putin Succession* (European Council on Foreign Relations, February 2008). Available online http://ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR-05_MEETING_MEDVEDEV_-_THE_POLITICS_OF_THE_PUTIN_SUCCESSION.pdf.

[c] Andrew Wilson (with Nicu Popescu) *The Limits of Enlargement-Lite: European and Russian Power in the Troubled Neighbourhood* (London, 2009) – seven European Capitals, plus Polish version. Available online http://ecfr.eu/content/entry/ecfr_eastern_neighbourhood_wilson_popescu.

[d] Andrew Wilson, *Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011). Submitted to REF2.

[e] Andrew Wilson, 'Ukraine' in *Pathways to Freedom: Political and Economic Lessons From Democratic Transitions* (Washington, DC: Council on Foreign Relations, June 2013). Submitted to REF2.

[f] Andrew Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, third edition, 2009). Available on request.

Evidence of **quality of underpinning research** is provided by the significance of the monographs from major academic publishers listed above, and the following grant:

PI: Dr Andrew Wilson. Funding body: British Academy. Title: Virtual Politics: Mimicking Democracy in the Post-Communist World. Amount: £4910. Duration: 1 March 2002 to 31 March 2004. Output: [a].

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Wilson's research had sweeping impacts on the policy of the European Union towards its eastern neighbours, the former countries of the Soviet Union. His recommendations, based on his research described in section 3, to upgrade and give extra resources to the 'Eastern Partnership' programme since its formal launch in May 2009 have been taken up by the EU, leading to a highly successful advisory mission to Moldova. He has consistently argued for twin track policies of 'sign and sanction' ('carrots and sticks') in Belarus and Ukraine and contributed to making the Ukrainian media more free and fair around election time in 2012.

Wilson has pursued an active engagement strategy with senior and influential decision-makers across Europe, both independently and as a senior policy fellow in a leading European think tank, the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). Drawing on his research, Wilson's high-level policy engagement – writing briefing notes, attending policy meetings and seminars, and private advice – has substantially shaped the EU's relations with its key Eastern neighbours.

European Union (EU) relations with Moldova

An Eastern Partnership (EaP) policy was formally launched on 7 May 2009. This EU policy is a technocratic, long-term strategy of offering partnership countries (the post-Soviet states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) the prospect of eventual political and economic alignment with the EU while dampening hopes of actual accession. In 2008–2009, a series of crises (conflict in Georgia, a gas crisis in Ukraine and the burning of the Moldovan parliament) indicated a need to rethink the EaP. In 2008–10 whilst a Senior Policy Fellow at the ECFR, Wilson collaborated with Nicu Popescu, a Moldova expert, to draw on his arguments in [a] to show that the EU's policy of 'enlargement-lite' would not be successful in eastern Europe. Wilson and Popescu argued that the EU was ineffective in responding to crises in partnership countries and that, consequently, Russia was strengthening its influence in the region [c]. Moldova had recently held disputed elections with serious violations of human rights. As a result, relations with the EU were at an all-time low. Wilson and Popescu argued that the best way to improve EU relations was through 'soft' approaches such as sending policy advisors to support the development of democratic institutions.

This report was widely praised in the press, including by the *Economist* and the *Guardian* [1]. Wilson and Popescu launched a highly activist advocacy strategy, including three EU-Russia seminars in Brussels with key EU officials (July 2008–May 2009), private meetings and delivering briefing notes to key policy makers, such as French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner (August 2008), and EU Foreign Policy High Representative Catherine Ashton (June 2010). The report was quoted in a speech by Poland's Foreign Minister, Radek Sikorski, at the Eastern Partnership summit in Warsaw in September 2011 [2], demonstrating that policymakers were listening.

Wilson and Popescu's arguments proved successful. The EaP was upgraded, made more conditional (the 'more for more' policy) and given greater resources [3]. In 2011 the EU declared a need to revise its European Neighbourhood Policy which governs EU relations with countries to the East and South of the EU: Wilson's research and advice [c] is evident in one of the four strands of the new approach, *"to provide greater support to partners engaged in building deep democracy"*

(rights to free speech, competitive political parties and impartial justice) [4].

Wilson's and Popescu's recommendation to send policy advisors to Moldova to support democratic reforms was adopted: the EU High Level Policy Advice Mission (EUHLPM) to Moldova was constituted in January 2010, with a team of 15 international expert advisors, and a current budget of €6.6 million funded by the European Union and co-funded and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme in Moldova [5]. Since then, the EUHLPM has helped to make this tiny and impoverished country a 'star pupil'. By 2012, Moldova ranked first in the Eastern Partnership Index for the liberal reforms encouraged by the EU and was the only one to buck a trend towards increasing authoritarianism [5]. The importance of the EUHLPM's contribution was recognised by the extension of its term to October 2013 and the increase of resources allocated to the EUHLPM from €1.5 million initially to €6.6 million in 2013 [5].

EU sanctions policy in Belarus

Shortly after a rigged election in 2010 and an aggressive crackdown on protests by Belarus, Wilson argued in an ECFR policy paper that, based on his analysis of President Lukashenka's hold on power [d], the EU needed to raise the stakes for both Belarus and Russia through a mixture of targeted and 'smart' isolation, selective sanctions and engagement [6], including the cessation of high-level contacts, visa bans for those responsible for the December 2010 election fraud (the 'sticks') and simultaneous investment in civil society (the 'carrot'). These recommendations were disseminated among EU policymakers through meetings, briefings and discussions, including two events (2010, 2011) where Wilson was lead speaker at the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO). As a direct result [6], EU sanctions policy for Belarus changed to a 'twin-track' policy of selective sanctions against Belarusian officials and support for civil society. This was announced by the European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy (Štefan Füle) on 2 February 2011, who also announced an increase in funding for civil society from €4 million to €15.6 million [7].

Suspension of the EU free trade agreement with Ukraine

The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) aims to give Ukraine a framework for modernising its trade relations with the EU through market liberalisation and various trade-related regulations to bring key sectors of the Ukrainian economy into alignment with EU standards. With a population of 45 million, Ukraine is the largest country in the Eastern Partnership and the EU is one of its most important trade partners. Yet relations were at an impasse because of concerns about the selective persecution of regime opponents and increasing authoritarianism and corruption.

In 2011 when EU–Ukraine relations were at a low point and negotiations on the DCFTA almost at an impasse, Wilson argued in a memo [8] for the ECFR that, based on his findings in [c], the EU should take a 'sign and sanction' approach to keep the DCFTA alive and allow Ukraine time to implement the policies recommended by the EU. As a result of Wilson's advice [6] disseminated through policy papers and talks, these recommendations were adopted by the EU in late 2011 [8].

Influencing election monitoring in Ukraine

Wilson's research [a] had showed how some political elites in post-Soviet countries *systematically* use political technology to 'fake democracy'. This was instrumental in shaping the strategy used by the Election Observation Mission (EOM) of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) for the 2012 parliamentary elections in Ukraine.

In 2006, Wilson was appointed advisor [9] to the OSCE, which monitors elections to check compliance with standards for democratic elections. Here, he drew on [a] to argue that election monitoring in post-Soviet countries should consider the election process as a whole instead of focusing on election day itself. Manipulating the cast list for the actual participants in elections, he argued, is as important for the elections outcomes as fraud in the counting process.

As a result of this advice, there were tangible changes in how the 623-member strong OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) EOM approached the 2012 parliamentary elections in Ukraine. In the early 2000s, the OSCE-ODIHR only looked at due process and clean counting on election day, whereas in 2012 its EOM in Ukraine was an embedded mission lasting several weeks to examine whether the whole process may be corrupted [10]. As a result, the EOM

identified specific political technologies used to 'fake democracy' [a], including abuse of state resources, lack of transparency of campaign and party financing and the lack of balanced media coverage [11]. Following the recommendations of this report, Ukraine announced the start of an electoral reform process, and the OSCE was requested to comment on the draft laws in April 2013. Some of the positive changes of the proposed reform which derive ultimately from Wilson's research are:

- Introducing requirements for reporting on the origin and use of campaign funds before election day and for publication of these reports on the CEC website;

- Including provisions intended to result in less biased coverage of the elections by the media and to reduce privileges given to government candidates over other candidates (p. 5, [12]).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[1] Press reports include 'Summer time blues: Will warm weather stiffen European spines?' *The Economist*, 19 June 2009. http://econ.st/1cCpuJz; 'Stormy outlook over the Black Sea' *The Guardian*, 6 August 2009. http://bit.ly/17yfnkm (ABC circulation: 311k http://www.theguardian.com/media/table/2009/sep/11/abcs-pressandpublishing).

[2] Sikorski's speech, quoting Wilson (in Polish), at http://bit.ly/17Rue91.

[3] On the decision to increase allocation for the Eastern partners by €150 million in 2011–2013, see the website of the EaP community http://bit.ly/H84nDn.

[4] EaP review (May 2011), *A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood: A review of European Neighbourhood Policy,* available at http://bit.ly/H1IC8Y [PDF]. See point 1, p. 2.

[5] Eastern Partnership Index, see http://www.eap-index.eu. On the revised budget of the EU High Level Policy Advice Mission (EUHLPM) to Moldova and its extension to October 2013, see the website of the EUHLPM: http://www.euhlpam.org. On the initial budget of the EUHLPM in January 2010, see: http://bit.ly/1ewJWw3. EU Policy Advisors presented (2010): http://bit.ly/1ewJWw3. EU brochure (2012) on the successes of the Eastern Partnership, including the work on consolidating democracy in Moldova on page 5: http://bit.ly/19XSvyM [PDF].

[6] Wilson policy paper (with Jarábik and Kobzova): *The EU and Belarus after the Election* (January 2011), http://bit.ly/16kPbJZ. Influence of research on decisions regarding Belarus and DCFTA with Ukraine corroborated by Senior Principal Research Analyst, the Eastern Research Group Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO).

[7] Press release of speech by Štefan Füle, European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy International Donors' Conference "Solidarity with Belarus" International Donors' Conference Warsaw, 2 February 2011 European Commission – SPEECH/11/63 02/02/2011. http://bit.ly/18sX0RG.

[8] ECFR Policy memo: Ukraine after the Tymoshenko Verdict (December 2011): http://bit.ly/19Wy07t. Council of the European Union conclusion on Ukraine – 10 December 2012. http://bit.ly/19Wy4UR [PDF].

[9] Wilson's position as advisor to OSCE and influence of his advice on the mission can be corroborated by the then-head of the OSCE/ODHIR Migration Unit, now Senior Fellow at the Jefferson Institute.

[10] Advice to the OSCE Election Monitoring Mission to use embedded, long-stay missions lasting several weeks can be corroborated by the Head of OSCE Election Monitoring Missions.

[11] OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) Election Observation Mission Final Report *UKRAINE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS* on 28 October 2012, report available at http://bit.ly/19ethLM. See p.16.

[12] OSCE and Venice Commission opinion on Ukraine's draft election reform law. http://bit.ly/1c2c2Si. Page 3: electoral reform instigated by OSCE election monitoring report. Pages 4–6 (specifically p. 5 for recommendations derived from [a]): OSCE election monitoring recommendations implemented in the draft reform.