

Foreign perspectives on 'Euromaidan' – An analysis of the three major weekly magazines *Der Spiegel*, *Der Stern* and *Focus*¹

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Abstract:

The article provides an analysis of the reporting about the Euromaidan actions of the three biggest German weekly magazines. The content analysis based on specific keywords will show, which politicians and events the journalists refer to. As a part of media reporting about the events that took place in Ukraine 2013–2014, the analysis will show an example of the topics German media talk about. It is obvious that well known Ukrainian politicians, such as Vitali Klitschko or Yulia Tymoshenko, are interviewed. Other politicians, such as Arseniy Yatsenyuk or Oleh Tyahnibok, barely appear in the reportings of the three weekly magazines. They are neither interviewed nor shown in detail. They seem to stand in the background of box champion Vitali Klitschko, who is very well known in Germany. The magazines call him "opposition leader" (that is wrong, he was one of the leaders of the opposition) and "the next strong man in Kiev". The reporting is centered on Tymoshenko and Klitschko. Another conclusion that can be made from the analysis is the perspective of the journalists. The conflict in Ukraine is mostly shown in the German-Russian-relationship and just marginally focused on Ukraine itself. Often, the consequences for Germany and the European economy are discussed.

Keywords:

[Euromaidan](#), [Ukraine](#), [Germany](#), [media](#), [analysis](#).

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Introduction

In its 26 years of independence, Ukraine has dealt with three political changes or revolutions. In 1991, there was the 'Revolution on Granite' that led to the state gaining independence. In 2004, there was the 'Orange Revolution', in which people demonstrated against a massive electoral fraud in the Presidential election. The last revolution, the so-called Euromaidan, took place between 21 November 2013 and 26 February 2014. This article will show, in the light of the response of the three major German weekly magazines, how the media reacted to that revolution. Most of the protest posters and slogans at the time of the revolution showed that Ukraine was concerned with her geopolitical situation: the majority of slogans were pro-European and anti-Russian, as a lot of protesters knew that Russia had a deep impact on the politics of Ukraine. Ukraine, in their opinion, had to become a free country.

The timeframe of the research of the weekly magazines *Der Spiegel*, *Der Stern* and *Focus* is 21 November 2013 to 31 March 2014. In this article, the timeframe is set until the end of March 2014 because, as it will be shown, the Crimean Crisis brought the issue of Ukraine and its protest on the international agenda again. A violent conflict with Russia began and is still on. Hence, the research is not yet complete.

Overview of the magazines

The analyses of weekly magazines make sense in terms of their popularity and circulation. Magazines 'reflect trends and culture' (Biagi, 2006, p.72). Daily newspapers try to show what happened the previous day, while weekly magazines try to summarize the events of a week. In this article, Germany's three biggest weekly magazines are analysed, showing how they reported the Euromaidan actions in

Ukraine to find out which actions or politicians mattered in this revolution. How do these magazines explain to German readers what is going on in Ukraine? Who are the key politicians and what are the actions? The analysis will answer these questions.

Der Spiegel is Germany's most popular weekly magazine. Every Monday, an edition of about 803,884 copies is published for a readership of 6.33 million (Schallmeyer, 2016). The Online Edition of *der Spiegel* is one of the most-visited online news pages in Germany (Statis, 2013).²

Der Stern publishes about 750,000 copies every Thursday. It has about 7.6 million readers, which is more than that of *Der Spiegel* (Statis, 2013).

Der Focus, published every Monday, is a less-circulated German weekly magazine. Its weekly circulation is about 500,000 copies and is read by five million people (Statis, 2013).

1. How much space within the magazine is dedicated to Euromaidan?

The following table shows how many articles, interviews and reports have been written on the issue of Euromaidan. To track articles on Euromaidan, several keywords such as 'Maidan', 'Euromaidan', 'Ukraine' and 'Russia' were used. The first issue to deal with the topic was number 48/2013 of *Der Spiegel*, which was the first of the three magazines to report on Ukraine.

² According to the Statistische Bundesamt is spiegel.de the web page with the highest Google index (Statis, 2013)

Table 1. Content analysis of Der Spiegel

Issue	SPIEGEL	STERN	FOCUS
48/2013 25.11.2013	3	-	-
49/2013	-	-	2
50/2013	10	7	-
51/2013	Title, 11	2	6
52/2013	1	2	2
1/2014 30.12.2013	-	11	2
2/2014	-	-	-
3/2014	-	-	-
4/2014	-	-	-
5/2014	2	2	4
6/2014	-	11	-
7/2014	3	2	-
8/2014	8	-	-
9/2014 24.02.2014	12	-	11
10/2014	4	12	6
11/2014	Title, 18	10	39
12/2014	14	16	5
13/2014	13	10	8
14/2014 31.03.2014	8	13	5
Total	109	98	90

Source: *Der Spiegel* issue 48/2013–14/2014.

2. How often is the Euromaidan the cover topic?

The Euromaidan has by itself never been the cover topic of the weekly magazines, although the Maidan and the protests have been shown in many of the numerous pictures published by them. That means, the Euromaidan and the situation in Ukraine were never shown on the first page with pictures and words. When the magazines dealt with the situation in Ukraine, mostly Russia was shown, for the state of Vladimir Putin appeared twice on the cover of *Spiegel* (# 51/2013 and # 11/2014). In 51/2013

the title is *The rowdy Putin attacks democracy and the West* (Neef, Schepp, 2013, p.1). In 11/2014, Putin was called *The arsonist: who can stop Putin?* (Blome, 2014a, p.1). Ukraine and the Maidan are never a cover topic. Media does not often discuss Ukraine, but does deal with Russia-EU relations and the consequences for German-Russian relations.

3. Which politicians do they talk about?

The analysis showed that *Der Spiegel* published over 100 pages on the Euromaidan. Now

a content analysis should show what these pages were about. The following analysis looks at the topics and politicians mentioned in the articles.

Der Spiegel

Two tendencies are evident from the following table. Firstly, the Ukrainian politicians *Der Spiegel* reports on are Vitali Klitschko and Viktor Yanukovich. Secondly, the politicians most often mentioned are Angela Merkel and Vladimir Putin. *Der Spiegel* deals with the conflict from a German point of view and tries to show the consequences for Germany and the EU. German-Russian relations are also a hot topic.

Table 2. Politicians named in reports of Der Spiegel

Issue	Politician	Content
48/2013	Yanukovich, Putin	Association Agreement
50/2013	Merkel, Putin, Klitschko	Klitschko as the new man in Kiev
50/2013	Aleksander Kwaśniewski	Interview (2 pages)
51/2013	Putin	Motives of Putin
51/2013	Klitschko	Interview (3 pages)
52/2013	Putin, Merkel	'Moscow's friends, Moscow's enemies'
5/2014	Yanukovich	Report about violence, new laws
7/2014	Putin, Yanukovich	Russia wants a violent solution in Kiev
7/2014	Akhmetov	Yanukovich has more money, Akhmetov could be a key figure, influence
8/2014	Klitschko	Brothers have a common project
9/2014	Yuri Blagodir (ex-Regioniv), Yanukovich, Achmetov, Firtash, Steinmeier	The power of the Billionaires, end of Yanukovich, protests in Lviv, Interview (3 pages)
10/2014	Yanukovich, new government	Mezhihiria documents, Simferopol
11/2014	Putin	Cover: Who can stop Putin? Protests in small cities in eastern Ukraine
11/2014	Radosław Sikorski	Interview (1 page) about relations between Europe and Russia
11/2014	Klitschko	Interview (2 pages)
12/2014	Merkel, Putin	Sanctions against Russia, Svoboda Party and German NPD, situation in East Ukraine and Crimea
12/2014	E.on-Chef Johannes Teysen	German Economy and Russia
12/2014	Ihor Tenyukh	Conflict with Russia, Interview (1 page)
13/2014	Merkel, Putin	Sanctions, EU and Ukraine, EU and China,
14/2014	NATO	NATO troops in Eastern Europe, Bundeswehr, 'Putin-Versteher' – 'Putin-understander'
14/2014	Olga Bogomolets	Candidate for Presidential elections

The following quote (#50/2013) describes the point of view of the German media very well.

The fight for Ukraine is a fight between the Russian President and the German Chancellor. The first round went to Putin. But Merkel and the Europeans see in boxer Vitali Klitschko a new strong man. (Blome, 2013, p. 22)

The numerous reports on and interviews with Klitschko are a result of inadequate knowledge of Ukrainian politics in Germany. The most well-known Ukrainian politician is Klitschko. He is a famous boxer in Germany and his boxing promotion is based in Hamburg. I would say that the brothers Klitschko are the most well-known Ukrainians in Germany. It is no wonder that German magazines report so much about them.

The next quote is very widespread in Germany (#50/2013):

Protest leader Klitschko in Kiev (Neef, 2013, p. 96)

This is factually wrong. Klitschko was the leader of the party, 'Udar', which was one of the three Parliamentary opposition parties (together with 'Batkivshchyna' and 'Svoboda'). In nearly all German media, Klitschko appeared to be the protest leader.

As mentioned above, Putin was twice on the cover. That supports the thesis that the magazines are more concerned about Russia than Ukraine. The following quote (#11/2014) testifies to that.

Russia occupies Crimea and breaks international law, the government in Kiev reacts helplessly. Europe and USA argue whether diplomatic pressure or sanctions could be the right answer. But what does Putin want? (Blome, 2014b, p.78).

This quote again underscores the Russia-centric reports in *Der Spiegel*. Although the crisis is in Ukraine, *Der Spiegel* asks what Russia's intentions are without mentioning Ukrainian's interests. The analysed magazines report more about Russia-EU relations than about people in Ukraine, as the following quote (taken from issue #13/2014) shows.

To stop the expansion of the NATO and EU, he [Putin] will risk a war with his sister people. (Schepp, 2014, p. 78)

Besides reports and interviews, there were some 'special' articles by historians and political scientists. An article by Timothy Snyder on the history of Germany and Russia and the protest posters at the Maidan was published. Christopher Clark published his research about the similarities between the crisis now and

the World War I in 1914 (#11/2014), and the 13/2014 issue had a report about Ukrainian writers and their opinions on the situation (among others Taras Prokhasko and Andrey Kurkov). German historian Frank Golczewski writes about history and the Crimean Crisis (#13/2014). These articles provide the necessary background to the conflict in Ukraine. For many Germans, Ukraine is an unknown country, and the little knowledge about the political situation and politicians in Ukraine could be one reason why the magazines report so much about Klitschko and Yulia Tymoshenko. *Der Stern* reports a lot about Tymoshenko, which will be shown in the next chapter.

Der Stern

Der Stern has a stronger tendency than *Der Spiegel* to write about individual politicians. It has reported almost all about Tymoshenko, Klitschko, Merkel, and Putin. The other politicians of the opposition parties were mentioned, but never interviewed or written about.

Table 3. Politicians named in reports in *Der Stern*

Issue	Politician	Content
50/2013	Klitschko vs. Yanukovych, Tymoshenko	Freedom for Tymoshenko, 'fight without rules'
51/2013		Demonstrations at the Maidan (picture)
52/2013		Barricades at the Maidan (picture)
1/2014	Klitschko	'The boxer turns into a national hero'
5/2014	Klitschko	Attack on Klitschko (picture)
6/2014	Klitschko	'Against the wall' people at the Maidan
7/2014		'Like a turtle' the Maidan shields (picture)
10/2014	Tymoshenko, Klitschko	'The war of Kiev', Tymoshenko's first appearance, opinions of the Maidan protesters about Klitschko
11/2014	Tymoshenko	Interview (5 pages), two-hour interview, history of Crimea
12/2014	Putin, Hillary Clinton about Putin	Image of Putin after Crimea, reaction of the West, Russia Today.
13/2014	Merkel and Putin	'Merkel and the Macho', motifs and influence of both, gas and geo-strategy
14/2014	Putin	57% of Germans say 'no' to Ukraine in EU, 'Ah, Russia' admiration of the President

A two-hour interview with Tymoshenko, and such titles as 'Merkel and the macho' prove the above thesis: It is all about the two Ukrainian politicians Klitschko and Tymoshenko, reports about what will happen to Germany if Putin's actions become more radical, and how concerned German journalists are about the political relations with Russia and the German economy.

A key quote from the *Stern* (# 6/2014) given below tries to explain why Klitschko is so supported by the Germans.

Vitali Klitschko is the most widely known opposition leader in Germany. Thanks to an almost daily column in 'BILD' the 42-year-old seems to be a resolute acting politician. (Sengling, 2014a, p.102)

Der Focus

Der Focus reaffirms the already proven thesis. All reports and interviews are about the well-known Ukrainians politicians Klitschko and Tymoshenko. The first article of *Der Focus* is an interview with Klitschko, where he calls his task at the Maidan his *hardest fight* (Zeslawski, 2013, p.46). Klitschko is also glorified here—he *fights for his country* and is shown *at the Maidan* (Zeslawski, 2013, p.46–47). But *Der Focus* also tries to show other important people at the Maidan, for example, the singer Ruslana or the key leader of the 'Batkivshchyna' party Arseniy.

Table 4. Politicians named in Der Focus

Issue	Politician	Content
49/2013	Klitschko	'My hardest fight' two-page interview
51/2013	Klitschko, Merkel and Klitschko, Tymoshenko in prison	'Klitschko fights for his country'
52/2013	Klitschko	Klitschko at the Maidan
5/2014	Yanukovych vs. Klitschko, Ruslana	'Fight of Kiev', 'Klitschko is the hope' Ruslana at the Maidan, Interview with Klitschko (1p)
9/2014	Tymoshenko comeback, Opposition (Klitschko and Yatsenyuk)	'Blood and peace', fight at the Maidan
10/2014	Tymoshenko	Biographer of Tymoshenko explains her strategy
11/2014	Putin	'Why does Putin behave like a tsar?', Russian troops at Crimea, new cold war? West and Crimea Crisis
11/2014	Jaap de Hoop Schefer	Ex-NATO-Secretary-General
12/2014	Merkel and Putin, Yanukovych	Mediator against Merkel's will, Merkel = 'Putin Versteherin', Donetsk = second Crimea
13/2014	Putin	Crimea Crisis, new cold war?
13/2014	Sergey Glazyev	1-page Interview
14/2014	NATO and Russia	Interview with NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen

Der Focus calls Merkel a 'Putin Versteher', someone who understands Putin. Besides, in this magazine, the West-East dichotomy is shown very clearly with NATO and the EU on one side and Russia on the other. Ukraine, as a country in between, is the showplace of the crisis and its escalation, but a minor topic.

4. How do the magazines report the actions of 30 Nov/01 Dec 2013?

During the night of 30 November 2013, the Berkut beat up a group of peaceful students. Hundreds of protesters were staying the night at the Maidan, almost half of them asleep.³ It was reported that the police special force,

Berkut, cleared the Maidan, leaving hundreds of injured people.

As this is more a topic for the daily newspapers, the weekly magazines did not report on that much. *Der Stern* wrote (#50/2013):

At the weekend the conflict became worse, stones were thrown and the police beat with truncheons. At the weekend, police special forces beat down people at the Maidan who were protesting peacefully. Yanukovych said that he was scandalized by the violence of the police. The people became even more angry because of that. (Sengling, 2013, p.55).

A picture of a man standing in front of a row with Berkut police men illustrated those words. *Der Stern* shows more pictures of the protests in Kiev than the other magazines. Articles published in *Der Stern* are more visual

and transport therefore their content also mainly with pictures.

5. How do the magazines report the actions of 18–22 February 2014?

The conflict turned violent at the end of February 2014. The metro in Kiev was closed for several days and the police tried to storm the Maidan to clear it. Almost 100 people died. On Saturday, 22 February, the President left the country and a new interim government was established. During the fights at the Maidan between police troops and protesters, the square was set on fire.

Der Spiegel #9/2014 publishes an interview with Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the German minister for foreign affairs, who was present during the violent actions in Kiev. The headline of the article was *Everything can still fail* (Neukirch, Hoffmann, 2014, p.36). He spoke about his experiences in Kiev: *We sat together for more than 20 hours. When we arrived, there were already black clouds of smoke over the Maidan, you could hear the bullets* (Neukirch, Hoffmann, 2014, p.37). *Der Spiegel* commented on the latest actions at the Maidan with the following words: *The bloody fights in Kiev have led to a compromise between the government and the opposition. The winners are not the people at the Maidan, but two of the richest men in the country* (Neef, 2014, 82), which is why the headline of the seven-page report reads *The power of the billionaires* (Neef, 2014, 82). The oligarchs Rinat Akhmetov and Dmytro Firtash are the focus of this report.

Der Stern #10/2014 called the actions a *fight over Kiev* (Sengling, 2014b, p. 93) and, in the 11-page report, author Bettina Sengling focused on Tymoshenko. She wrote about her unexpected release from prison and how Tymoshenko's daughter cried on the stage. *Der Spiegel* characterized the Maidan as a parallel society with its own police force and medical

service. In this article, the political potential of Klitschko was doubted, as gathered from the questioning of Ukrainians, who considered Klitschko too inexperienced to hold such a powerful political position as that of a president. Pictures of the destroyed Maidan were shown.

Der Focus #9/2014 headline was *Blood and Peace* (Bazdyrieva, 2014, p. 33): *What a week, what a drama between civil war and the triumph of democracy: At the Maidan in Kiev dozens were killed, then the ruler Viktor Yanukovych gave up. Now, Ukraine is ordering itself new.* (Bazdyrieva, 2014, p. 33). *Der Focus* showed the Maidan before (*postcard view*) and after (*battlefield*) and writes the pathetic line from the postcard view to the battlefield (Bazdyrieva, 2014, p. 34). The Tymoshenko release was also a topic, and she was called *the people's hope* (Bazdyrieva, A., 2014, p. 38). *Der Focus* also mentioned the other opposition politicians, Yatsenyuk and Tyahnibok, and reported that the future of the opposition, united against Yanukovych, was unsure.

Conclusions

The German weekly magazines are very interested in the situation in Ukraine but always from a Russian-centric and geopolitical point of view. The reports are about the actions in Kiev, the political situation, and Ukraine's future. But they are very one-sided, where the pro-Yanukovych forces are not mentioned. The focus is on politicians who are well known in Germany (like Klitschko and Tymoshenko), while other opposition party leaders are never interviewed or reported on more closely (Yatsenyuk for example or Tyahnibok). There is also a strong tendency to see the Ukrainian struggles through a German perspective: Merkel and Putin, Germany's relation to Russia, and whether all Germans understand Putin. This is the main tendency, which seldom highlights Ukraine's interests and its past.

³ <https://web.archive.org/web/20131130061102/http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-25164990>

Der Spiegel published some reports about Ukraine's past but the other magazines are confined to daily reports. 👁

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Euromajdan postrzegany z zagranicy – analiza trzech najważniejszych niemieckich tygodników: „Der Spiegel“, „Der Stern“ i „Focus“.

Streszczenie:

W artykule przedstawiono analizę sprawozdań nt. wydarzeń określanych mianem Euromajdanu, zaczerpniętych z trzech największych niemieckich tygodników. Analiza treści na podstawie określonych słów kluczowych pokazuje, jak niemieccy politycy i dziennikarze wydarzenia te rozumieją i interpretują. Czymś oczywistym jest obecność wywiadów z dobrze znanymi politykami ukraińskimi, takimi jak Witalij Kliczko czy Julia Tymoszenko. Inni politycy jednak, jak Arsenij Jaceniuk lub Ołeh Tiahnybok, ledwie pojawiają się w doniesieniach tych tygodników. Brakuje zarówno wywiadów z nimi, jak i szczegółowych informacji na temat ich osób i działalności. Sporo uwagi niemieckich mediów koncentruje na sobie Witalij Kliczko, słynny w Niemczech bokser. Magazyny nazywają go „liderem opozycji“ (co nie jest do końca zgodne z prawdą, bo był on tylko jednym z liderów), a także „następnym silnym człowiekiem w Kijowie“. Doniesienia skupiają się na Tymoszenko i Kliczce. Kolejny wniosek, jaki może być wyciągnięty z analizy dotyczy perspektywy dziennikarzy. Konflikt na Ukrainie pokazywany jest głównie na tle relacji niemiecko-rosyjskich i tylko jako marginalnie dotyczący samej Ukrainy. Często omawiane są kwestie istotne dla Niemiec i gospodarki europejskiej.

Słowa kluczowe:

Euromajdan, Ukraina, Niemcy, media, analiza.