

Introduction

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The annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas, apart from their evident geopolitical and security repercussions, have also led to the almost total disruption of communication between the Russian and Ukrainian societies, including the academic communities of the two countries. Predictably, professional contacts between academics and policy experts have become scarce and sparse in the wake of these events, and this in turn has only widened the political gap between Moscow and Kyiv.

Against this gloomy backdrop, the annual conferences of Ukrainian and Russian (and, since 2017, also American) alumni of the Kennan Institute stand out as an exceptional practice aimed at sustaining the academic dialogue that has been severely damaged by the current crisis.¹ It was within this format of interaction that the idea of this special section was born. During the 2016 Kennan Alumni Conference held at the University of Tartu's Johan Skytte Institute of Political Science, we decided to collect and publish a selection of academic papers that would reflect the attitudes existing among Ukrainian and Russian experts with regard to five specific issues in the two countries: the phenomenon of the Euromaidan (2013–2014); subnational policies; relations with the United States; memory politics; and civil society. These issues reflect some of the hottest points in both domestic and foreign policy debates in the two countries, and illuminate the major sources of identity-ridden conflicts and disagreements between them.

¹ Founded in 1974, the Washington-based Kennan Institute is committed to improving expertise and knowledge about Russia, Ukraine, and other states in the region, and its residential scholarships draw some of the best academics in the humanities and social sciences.