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Ukraine – near foreignness of the European Union?

1. Status of Ukraine in the 90s

Before 1991 Ukraine as an independent state was a dream rather than political reality. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union this old dream of the Ukrainian people finally came true.

From a strategic point of view, for a few years right after Ukraine received its independence in 1991, the West considered Ukraine vitally as an important link or a “milestone” of the European safety. But in 1996 the last strategic atomic rockets were taken out from military bases in Khmelnytc’k and Pervomajs’k to Russia. So Ukraine, to the great regret, begun to be considered as a weak state, an “outsider”.

Ukraine, while it is situated between Russia and the rest of Europe, proclaimed a “bivectorial foreign policy”. It declared a status of a neutral and non-aligned state. It attempted to set a strategic partnership both with the East and with the West.

2. Geopolitical pluralism of Ukraine: is there any viable “bivectorial” strategy of the Ukrainian foreign policy?

Though the West supported “geopolitical pluralism” among former Soviet republics, it actually wanted Ukraine to remain in the structure of CIS as the only former Soviet state which can be a coun-

terbalance to the hegemony of Russia. Thus, Ukraine moved into directions of both the West and the East. Nevertheless, recently there has been a sharp worsening of relationships with the East. And the relations with the West vice versa became better.

a. Western (European) choice

In April 2002 Ukraine proclaimed as its strategic purpose the entry to NATO, although its relationships with NATO were already taken to the political dialogue and military collaboration.

Membership in the European Union for Ukraine is a much more attractive choice, although only a small part of Ukrainians consider themselves as Europeans or understand the mechanisms of the European integration. On the other hand, considerable part of Europeans approaches sceptically the integration of country such as Ukraine that would be the biggest member state regarding the territory and the fourth biggest regarding the amount of population. Certain problems in Ukrainian accession to the EU and NATO are raised because European integration was repeatedly and quite selfishly used in internal political discussions in Ukraine.

b. Eastern (Eurasian) Slavonic choice

After regaining the independence Ukraine resisted to the attempts of Russia to integrate former Soviet republics again. It even created the group of the states – GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldavia) for providing of alternative trade-routes over the Black Sea in order to be saved from the dependence on the supply of power mediums from Russia. But economic dependence on the supply of the Russian power mediums has yet existed. There are also close social relationships (in fact, half of all

Ukrainians have relatives in Russia). These circumstances cause the renewal of amities with Russia. In September 2003 this tendency was reflected in creation of Common Economic Space (CES) with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, simultaneously the crises related to the Kerch channel, the project of a dam at Tuzla and a supply of Russian gas to Ukraine, constitute the evidence that there are serious contradictions between Russia and Ukraine.

3. Intentions and strategies of main players in relation to Ukraine

There is no doubt that main ambitions and intentions of Russia appear the renewal of its influence on territories of the former USSR. This strategy is fruitfully rooted in the corporate and authoritarian environment of Ukraine. From the Russian point of view, Ukraine belongs to the core of the Russian empire. It is related to the ethnic contacts and historical backgrounds.

The policy of the USA during the nineties came out from the principles of safety rather than an aspiration to support political and economic reforms in Ukraine. In relation to Ukraine Europe acted even more inconsistently, except for the fact that Ukraine acceded the trade rules of the EU (Partnership and Cooperation Agreement) and conditions of the joint EU-Ukraine Action Plan.

However, now let us look at the changes in attitude of the West towards Ukraine: Ukraine was proclaimed as a country with market economy status.

Main partners and more active participants of the process concerning development and implementation of the policy towards

Ukraine are: the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Canada and Poland. Other Western countries from the Ukrainian point of view remain passive enough. Number of reasons predefines it. The main reason is an absence of interest or historical relations with Russia. It is logical that intentions of the West were perceived with suspicion and caution, as attempt to create a “sanitary border” from the Black to the Baltic Sea or even, in a strategic sense, to “go round” Russia.

Europe used to perceive Ukraine as a backward country somewhere on the European geographical and cultural backyards. Though such an appeal was changed after the Orange Revolution, many EU member states up to now consider Ukraine as the quasi-Soviet state that much depends on Russia.

4. Consequences of expansion of NATO and the EU

a. The way to NATO

The collaboration between Ukraine and NATO, started with signing the NATO-Ukraine Charter in 1997, has developed at many levels. However, there exist also internal limitations of development of collaboration with NATO, some of them are obvious (absence of resources), some rather hidden (most of Ukrainians still perceive NATO through the prism of Cold War. This opinion is supported by the Ukrainian military structures which still perceive NATO as an enemy).

b. Prospects of the EU

Particular achievements in the EU-Ukraine relationship, since the approval of the joint Action Plan, have included signing the Memorandum of Understanding on Energy Co-operation, the open-

ing of negotiations on visa facilitation in parallel to negotiations on a readmission agreement, as well as granting a market economy status to Ukraine and the establishment of the EU Border Assistance Mission on the border between Ukraine and Moldova, including the Transnistrian segment.

The European Neighbourhood Policy opens new partnership, economic integration and cooperation perspectives:

- the perspective of moving beyond cooperation to a significant degree of integration, including a stake in the EU's Internal Market, and the possibility for Ukraine to participate progressively in key aspects of EU policies and programs;
- an upgrade in the scope and intensity of political cooperation;
- the opportunity for convergence of economic legislation, the opening of economies to each other, and the continued reduction of trade barriers which will stimulate investment and growth;
- increased financial support;
- possibilities of gradual opening of, or reinforced participation in, certain Community programs, promoting cultural, educational, environmental, technical and scientific links;
- support for legislative approximation to meet EU norms and standards, including technical assistance, twinning and targeted advice and support;
- deepening trade and economic relations to follow Ukraine's accession to the WTO;

- consideration will be given to the possibility of a new enhanced agreement, whose scope will be defined in the light of the fulfilment the overall evolution of EU-Ukraine relations. The advisability of any new contractual arrangements will be considered in future.

So, we hope that participation of new members, especially Poland, in development and implementation of the EU foreign policy will stimulate the embodiment of these perspectives. These countries have to bring in important experience of transformation of their own societies and knowledge on cultural and political character of new neighbours.

5. Elements of the future strategy

a. In search of a new positive paradigm

Ukraine's ability to influence on regional and international stability is a factor that really makes it a key country. Such country is in a position both to create economic foundations and to guarantee safety at least in the region.

b. Internal situation in Ukraine

The key to success lies in Ukraine, not abroad. Ukrainian authorities must adhere to rational and substantiated hopes, to avoid the conduct that is hard to foreseen. From this point of view the necessary pre-condition of further development of relationships with EU and NATO is an active collaboration in such spheres as international safety and observance of laws. Ukraine should keep on protecting and developing pluralism in a public sphere, particularly in an non-governmental sector and mass-media.

6. Recommendations: what it is needed to do?

a. Role of the USA: the guarantor of strategic stability.

The USA must limit influence of Russia on Ukraine. To resist Russian expansion into the countries where Russia still engages in the sphere of its interests (former USSR) by their general destabilization and the injury of supremacy of law, strategy of transformation must concentrate on effective management and efforts directed at reforms.

b. Role of EU: establishment of scopes of socio-economic development.

Ukraine is a key transit country for the economic relations between Europe and Asia. The EU must offer a clear economic policy concerning Ukraine. Such policy must provide for:

- further opening of EU market for the Ukrainian export - agricultural products and steel, that is a necessary precondition of diminishing of dependence of Ukraine from the export to Russia;
- creation of new work places in order to provide for the economic growth in the border regions of Ukraine, that must prevent the subsequent increase of immigration;
- opening a labour-market for Ukrainians with the goal to support Ukrainians' funds transfer to a motherland.

c. Role of new members of EU: transfer of know-how and possibilities

The Eastern policy of Central European countries must play a special role in relations between the EU and Ukraine in the following aspects:

- transferring to Ukraine of know-how related to transformation of society, reforms and civic education;
- a help to create local funds for effective management and democracy;
- a removal of illegal migration: delivery of employment permits to the Ukrainian workers and providing their basic rights.

d. Role of Russia: adjusting relationships with Europe.

Russia substantially depends on economic relations with Europe. Thus, Russia must be interested either in stabilizing Ukraine as a key transit corridor to Europe, or in eliminating all obstacles on the way of subsequent development of relations between Ukraine and the EU. In order to adjust the relationships with Europe, Russia would have:

- to adhere (as well as Ukraine) to the rules of WTO;
- to facilitate movements of persons and goods.

7. Conclusions

Ukraine has enormous potential which is now being used. Recent experience of social and economic transformation in the countries of Central Europe proves that bold intentions can become reality. And in the near future Ukraine indisputably will hold a deserved seat among other states of Europe.