

## UKRAINE-NATO RELATIONS: THE LONG-TERM VIEW



Today, Europe is experiencing an unusually stormy and dynamic era. When, in the early 1990s, Professor Zbigniew Brzezinski analyzed the consequences of the dissolution of the USSR and foresaw the possibility that Ukraine might embark on a path of integration into Europe, few in the West agreed with him [1]. Today, just a short time later, Ukraine is actively cooperating with the EU and NATO, taking steps not only on paper, but also in practice, that bring it closer to those key organizations. One of the primary directions of Ukraine's state policy of national security is "entry into the existing and emerging systems of regional and global security" [2]. Even prior to the signing of the NATO-Ukraine Charter on a Distinctive Partnership, then Minister of Foreign Affairs Gennadi Udovenko stated that "the formalizing of relations with NATO is

seen by us as a step along the path to full-fledged integration with the European and Atlantic structures" [3].

The state of European security depends in considerable measure on the security of Ukraine. This role is made pithier by the process of NATO enlargement to the East. NATO enlargement makes the problem of Ukraine's geopolitical choices more acute, narrowing the space for maneuver and forcing decision-making under the pressure of time constraints. While the process of North Atlantic Alliance expansion carries for Ukraine a series of potential threats, it also opens new possibilities for Ukraine's future.

The Ukrainian declaration that it is not a member of any bloc carries with it the threat of turning Ukraine into a "buffer" between the Alliance and Russia should relations between those two entities worsen. If the process of NATO enlargement slows following the entry into the Alliance of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, Ukraine risks being left in a Russian sphere of influence. Forced closeness with NATO also opens Ukraine to pressure from Russia, which considers the entry into NATO of even the Baltic states unimaginable.

The North Atlantic Alliance appears today to be an institution of great promise, meeting all the requirements that would enable it to become the base of a system of European security for the 21st century. As a consequence of its geopolitical position, Ukraine cannot remain outside of such a system as it is being formed, and thus should take an active part in this process.

Objectively, Ukraine today is not ready to be a full member of NATO. The on-going socio-economic crisis, with its elements of political instability does not bode well for Ukrainian integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, as the March Parliamentary elections have demonstrated. The left wing parties, which attained great success in these elections, campaigned on anti-NATO slogans. The Communist Party of Ukraine accused the government of turning the country into a "marionette of NATO" [4], while the pre-election platform of the Socialist Party of Ukraine and the agrarian parties called for "not allowing the transformation of Ukraine into a colony, an appendage of NATO" [5]. Increased tension between the legislative and executive branches of

government is quite likely in the aftermath of those elections and this will not favor either reforms or tighter cooperation with the NATO Alliance.

For integration of Ukraine into NATO to be feasible, a transitional period is required, during which NATO expands into the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the NATO-Russia Founding Act is implemented, the "Distinctive Partnership" between NATO and Ukraine is realized through concrete actions, and the Alliance itself evolves from a focus on political-military issues to one on political, economic, ecological, and other key concerns for international cooperation. This evolution is already underway, as the chief factor that spurred the creation of NATO has disappeared and NATO seeks a new mission. The process will inevitably accelerate with the entry of new Alliance members.

It follows that Ukraine should state its priorities and intentions more explicitly. Ukraine is faced with the task of creating the conditions that might enable eventual entry into NATO. The process of integration of Ukraine into Euro-Atlantic institutions, including NATO, should be synchronized as much as possible with socio-economic and political reform in Ukraine. Successful market reforms; strengthening of democratic institutions; expanding the legal structures; building up a citizen-based society; introduction of civilian control of the armed forces and reform of the armed forces themselves; and development of good relations with neighboring states, firstly with Russia - these are only the first, basic problems that Ukraine must solve before it can realistically have any hope of membership in the Alliance. The realization of such reforms will make Ukraine a more attractive candidate in the eyes of the current Alliance members, give it the capability to truly contribute to European stability, and help it to develop a more proactive foreign policy that will enable it to more actively develop the geopolitical space around it. For successful realization of these reforms, considerable economic and technical assistance on the part of NATO member countries is urgently needed.

A very important factor for the definition of prospects for Ukraine-NATO relations is the attitude of Ukrainian society to the possibility of Ukraine's joining the Alliance. According to a 1997 poll, carried out by the firm Socis-Gallup for the Democratic Initiatives Fund, of 1200 respondents polled, 38% answered in the positive the question regarding the prospect of Ukrainian NATO membership. Of those 38%, half, 19%, felt that Ukraine should become a NATO member as quickly as possible. Twenty-one percent, however, were categorically opposed to NATO membership for Ukraine.

The poll also found a considerable discrepancy in attitudes towards the Alliance between Ukrainians in the East and those in the West of the country [6]. It is not only the staying power of Soviet-era attitudes towards NATO that is at issue, but also the generally low level of knowledge among the population regarding the real nature of the Alliance.

Ukraine must therefore actively cooperate with the alliance within the framework of the generally successful Partnership for Peace (PFP) program and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), and implement the possibilities outlined in the NATO-Ukraine Charter. Increased practical military cooperation between Ukraine and NATO, as well as the seeking out of opportunities for cooperation in the field of military technology, is of particular importance.

Cooperation in military education is a promising area that should be further pursued. Study by Ukrainian officers in military educational institutions in NATO member countries, focusing especially on linguistic preparation and familiarization with NATO standards for administration and procedure, is especially important. This would support successful institution of military reforms and the preparation of the Ukrainian officer corps and the military infrastructure as a whole for even more advanced cooperation.

Critical to cooperation within the framework of the NATO-Ukraine Charter would be the institutionalization of the Crisis Consultative Mechanism for review of potential threats to security, territorial integrity, and the political independence of Ukraine. Ukraine must also seek to

obtain additional security guarantees from NATO members. This would enhance stability and prudent policy-making during a time of dynamic change within and around Ukraine. Positive results in these areas will foster efforts towards a coordinated policy regarding NATO enlargement and cooperative development of the conceptual principles of military policy.

The Russian factor will be one of the primary determinants of the development of Ukraine-NATO relations. Its effects will stem from the character and scale of economic association between Russia and Ukraine, especially Ukrainian dependence on Russian energy sources and Ukraine's resultant debt and Ukraine's interest in the Russian market for its manufactured goods. Also key to the relationship between Russia and Ukraine will be the maintenance of the Russian naval base at Sevastopol and ethno-cultural ties between the two countries.

Simultaneously, the dynamic nature of the Russian and Ukrainian economies will have tremendous significance. Russian capital is less risk-averse than Western capital, and thus the risky Ukrainian market is less frightening to it. Following the signing of the Russian-Ukrainian Economic Agreement, Russian investors are expressing great interest in participating in the privatization of the most promising Ukrainian enterprises, especially the natural gas shipping and oil refining sectors. Should these plans be realized, this additional factor will further complicate Ukrainian moves towards integration with the West, and leave Russia with a powerful lever of influence over its neighbor. The economic expansion of Russian investment capital would also increase in power if Russian economic growth stabilizes.

In line with this, the evolution of the political situation in Russia can also have a significant influence on the geopolitical orientation of Ukraine. There exists the possibility that in the year 2000 a more radical leadership may come to power in Russia (i.e., Lebed or Luzhkov). This would result in great change in Russian foreign policy, both on the global level and in relation to the young states that were once component parts of the USSR. The following scenarios seem plausible as descriptions of how the situation could develop following the next presidential elections in Ukraine and Russia:

Scenario #1 : In Russia, the newly elected President is a centrist (i.e., Chernomyrdin) and in Ukraine the President is a centrist or a left centrist. This scenario posits the calmest and most stable relation between Ukraine and Russia of those we will consider. Russia strives to influence the international situation through the NATO-Russia Founding Act. Ukraine develops political and military contacts with NATO within the framework of the Charter, domestically directs its efforts towards building democratic institutions and market infrastructure, and implements military reform through cooperation with NATO. While a decision on Ukraine's part to join NATO is unlikely, insofar as Ukraine is not ready for full membership, there is no threat to Ukraine's continued independence.

Scenario #2: Russia elects a populist or leftist President (i.e., Lebed, Luzhkov, Seleznyov). Ukraine elects a centrist or left centrist. The relationship between Russia and Ukraine worsens. The probability that Ukraine will turn to NATO for help increases, as does the possibility that Ukraine will ask to join the Alliance, thus increasing the risk of deteriorating domestic situation.

Scenario #3: Leftist Presidents are elected in Russia and Ukraine. While this scenario is the least probable, it is also potentially the most dangerous. It suggests a high likelihood of closer ties between Ukraine and Russia, even to the point of an anti-NATO military alliance. The most radical variation on this scenario, in which Russia attempts to renew its domination of a significant part of the former USSR, could lead to a "Mini-Cold War."

It would be exceedingly difficult, painful, and dangerous for Ukraine to build a new wall on its northeastern border. Therefore, the central task is instead to search for means to involve Russia in cooperation with NATO that does not take place at the expense of Ukraine but rather is broad enough to draw Russia and Ukraine into a new security structure that stretches from Vancouver to Vladivostok. Efforts to isolate Russia are unsafe both for Ukraine and for European security as a whole.

Western analysis of the prospects for Ukrainian integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions was for a long time predominantly skeptical in nature. One characteristic example was RAND Corporation research into issues related to NATO enlargement. Their most optimistic scenario for Ukraine saw it "Finlandized," and that assumed a considerable influx of economic assistance—more than the West seems prepared to give [7]. Although this scenario underestimates the likely negative reaction on the part of Russia, its very formulation assigns a high probability to renewed confrontation in Europe.

From the perspective of the Ukrainian national interest, the opening of NATO to potential new members is an optimal course. It presents an evolutionary path of enlargement that takes into account the entire complex of internal and external conditions in applicant and partner countries and seeks to implement a variety of forms of cooperation (multilateral, etc.).

The process of integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions would ideally be synchronized with the processes of building democratic institutions domestically: a civil society, completion of market reforms, harmonization of market infrastructure with western infrastructures, and the development of national identity. Even if the tempo of implementation of these political and economic reforms is accelerated, the creation of a fully educated society of citizens sharing a national identity will still take a longer period of time, beyond the framework of our medium-term projections.

To forecast the development of events beyond the year 2005 or so is very difficult, as there is high uncertainty regarding the future of Russia and the complex processes ongoing in Ukraine itself. Further, we cannot forget the potential development of new threats on the regional and the global level, which would essentially change the dynamic and the character of the situation in Europe. Without question, however, it is worthwhile for both NATO and Ukraine to continue to together weave the fabric of cooperation, searching for new approaches and methods, developing and meeting the requirements for next steps, and thus working to develop ever-closer relations with each other.

#### NOTES

1. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Out of Control: Global Turmoil on the Eve of the 21st Century*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), p. 156.
2. *Zerkalo Nedeli* (Weekly Mirror), January 18, 1997.
3. *Den'*(Day), March 4, 1997.
4. *Uriadovoy Kur'ier* (Administrative Courier), February 29, 1998.
5. *Uriadovoy Kur'ier*, March 10, 1998.
6. *Politichniy Portret Ukraini: Zovnishnia Politika Ukraini i Hromadska Dumka* (Political Portrait of Ukraine: Ukrainian Foreign Policy and Public Opinion), No. 18 (Kyiv, 1997), p. 111.
7. Ronald D. Asmus, Richard L. Kugler, and F. Stephen Larrabee, *NATO Expansion: Next Steps*, (RAND, 1995), pp. 25-26.