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Ukraine's European Choice: Pitfalls and Prospects

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Introduction

Ukraine's post-Soviet history is a sad story of an increasingly poorer country in a progressively wealthier world. Owing its very existence to terminal decay and collapse of a totalitarian state, where Ukraine was originally conceived as a provincial satrapy, the country was born of the ashes of the former Soviet Union in December 1991. The fallen superpower endowed its former republic with a France-size territory, 55 million population, some well advanced and some less successful but functioning industries, skilled labor force and one of the best developed social welfare systems in Europe. Three years later, all of it, save territory, was gone, some – gone for good. Nine years later, Ukraine joined the ranks of the world's poorest and most corrupt states. Twelve years later, Ukraine seems to be of no particular interest to the rest of the world; verifiably irrelevant for all practical purposes and so completely out of sight of the international media that almost any Central Asian statelet looks a celebrity in comparison.

And yet, several things distinguish Ukraine from less developed African countries. An important caveat is furnished by geography: Ukraine is still located in Europe. Ukraine remains a bridgehead between Europe and Russia. Russia, though a bleak shadow of her own past, is still a continent in itself, and acquires a new significance as western ally in the so-called "anti-terrorism" warfare for the control over the unstable world peripheries. Russia does carry strategic energy reserves of the twenty-first century, while Ukraine owns transportation networks to bring Russian gas and, potentially, Russian and Azeri oil to the energy-starved Europe. The eastward expansion of the European Union brings it straight to the Ukrainian borders, which means that Ukraine's trade with its western neighbors becomes subject to the EU regulations, and free movement of people across the border must stop at the entrance to a newly expanded Schengen zone. Ukraine shares borders with NATO members Poland and Hungary, while not being a NATO member itself.

Ukraine has entered the new century in the throes of a deep political crisis over the alleged involvement of President Kuchma in politically motivated killing of independent Internet journalist Georgy Gongadze. While Gongadze has been posthumously elevated to the martyrdom list of the international non-governmental organization Reporters Without Borders and bestowed the OSCE award for defense of free speech in his country, Ukraine's political establishment shrugged off the tragedy as a completely peripheral, even if unfortunate episode that can hardly make anyone doubt either the depth of Ukraine's postcommunist transformation or sincerity of its pro-western choice. Western darling, the reformist Prime Minister Yushchenko tailored his last ex-officio addresses as economic success stories that shied away from such issues as increasingly dictatorial powers of the president, pervasive corruption and criminalization of the government, virtual absence of independent judiciary and weeding out of independent media. Foreign Minister Zlenko insisted that Ukraine's western orientation was as solid as ever and reaffirmed the desire to join the European Union sooner rather than later. President Kuchma dismissed the Gongadze case, together with all concerns over freedom of expression in the country, as dirty tricks of the unnamed "enemies of Ukraine" and vaguely hinted at some international conspiracy as a root cause of the problem. The implicating testimony of former

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secret service agent Mykola Melnychenko, strengthened by 300 hours of tapes that recorded presidential conversations with his trusted lieutenants, did not make those who, in Melnychenko's words, turned Ukraine into "one big protection racket" blink twice.¹

Less than a year later, Ukraine's western "vocation" was all the vogue once again. The U.S. Congress was lobbied by Ukraine's local sympathizers not to decrease the amount of foreign aid appropriations earmarked for America's "best friend" in the post-Soviet region. Ukrainian diaspora activists closed ranks behind the flag, taking the cause of the "old country" back to heart once the fear that western neglect may prompt Ukraine-Russia rapprochement set in. Panegyrics to the "European choice" sung to various bodies in Brussels by Ukraine's government plenipotentiaries and opposition leaders alike touched European soul's sentimental strings. By the end of March 2001 Sweden, which then chaired the EU, confirmed that Ukraine remained the EU's "strategic partner and friend."² The Council of Europe failed to initiate the expulsion procedures for human rights violations, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was able to reach, a month later, an undeservedly tolerant final conclusion on the "Ukraine issue," even as Kiev's assault on independent media continued.³ Speaking in Warsaw in June 2001, U.S. President George W. Bush insisted that

The Europe we are building must include Ukraine, a nation struggling with the trauma of transition. Some in Kiev speak of their country's European destiny. If this is their aspiration, we should reward it. We must extend our hand to Ukraine, as Poland has already done with such determination.⁴

In little more than a month after that, three high-level visits to Kiev by U.S. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, NATO Secretary-General Lord George Robertson, and EU Secretary General and foreign policy chief Javier Solana confirmed western interest in this geopolitically important country. As Elizabeth Jones, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European affairs, chose to put it, "Ukraine matters to the United States because we believe in its European destiny."⁵

Judging by all appearances, western confidence in Ukraine's ability to "rejoin" Europe sooner rather than later is not yet depleted. While Russia's potential membership in the EU has not been subject to a serious consideration, Ukraine has been able to demand a timetable commitments and, having failed to obtain those, nevertheless succeeded in keeping the issue afloat. Since Ukraine's internal situation in many respects – from economic reform and overall health of its industry to democratic accountability, judiciary independence and viability, local governance, and freedom of individual expression – is no better, and often worse than Russia's, one could wonder if western embrace of the country is not a prima facie example of wishful thinking. But what motivates it? Is Ukraine needed as such or for reasons that are extraneous to the country's intrinsic merits?

Until September 11, 2001, forever redefined western understanding of global security risks, Ukraine's geopolitical importance for the West could only be explained vis-à-vis implicitly suspicious, if not hostile, perceptions of Russia. Even now, despite a conspicuous rapprochement that occurred in the wake of terrorist attacks on America and Russia's unprecedented support of the U.S. involvement in Central Asia, Russia still remains "Europe's Other" for most practical purposes. As "Europe's Other," it is the country regularly defined in tones almost antithetical to all things properly "European." Thus, Europe is democratic – Russia is not; Europeans espouse market capitalism – Russians were only able to introduce a "bandit" or "oligarchic" capitalism, which in any case stifles genuine competition and harms the consumer; Europe is law-based –

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Russia is corrupt and lawless, and so on. It naturally follows that Europe's international behavior is predictable and motivated by humane considerations, while Russia's must be egoistic, subject to unexpected and unannounced changes and generally resembling that of a rogue state much more than that of a responsible member of the international community.

Western opinion leaders who had developed this mode of thinking, or rather, were unable to part ways with the Cold War-era mentality in spite of all changes that transpired in the real world, flattered all non-Russian republics of the former Soviet Union for their alleged role in bringing communism down. Throughout the first post-Soviet decade, some individuals indiscriminately praised anti-Russianism in Russia's immediate vicinity as the best proof of democratic credentials and western orientation of a newly independent state. Ukraine in particular was represented as a western *antemurale*, an imaginary barrier protecting against speculatively postulated and largely illusory Russian "menace." Anti-Russianism justified Ukrainian independence as a value in itself, in an almost complete disregard to political and social reality that was shaping out in the country. Ukraine was fine as long as it was not aligned with Russia, the rest was clearly of a lesser value. Speculations of this nature conceived of Ukraine as the easternmost borderland of the European civilization, a clearly allied satellite, versus largely self-reliant and, hence, less controllable Russia.

These western perceptions "commodified" Ukrainian foreign policy, in a sense that the country leaders had felt obliged to support the myth of Russian "resurgent imperialism" or potential instability for reasons that had less to do with reality and more – with Kiev's desire to benefit from mostly rhetorical reassertion of Ukraine's key role in the emerging security system in Europe. Once the demand for a post-Cold War geostrategic "commodity" was created, the supply had to follow. Ukrainians realized that the country occupies a potentially lucrative position on global security markets.

Security considerations, not economic benefits, shared beliefs or purely altruistic motifs, had prompted Clinton administration to elevate Ukraine to a position of the third largest recipient of the U.S. foreign aid in mid-nineties. Opinion makers in Ukraine could not hide their glee. "If the Congress convinces Mr. Clinton of futility to stake all bets on Yeltsin's dying regime and pushes through with redistribution of financial aid in Ukraine's favor, our prospects will be even better," went one of the typical accounts. "Ukraine has all the chances to transform itself from the world's Cinderella into a quite respectable lady."⁶

Throughout most of the post-independence period, Kiev has been "selling" the country's well-advertised strategic location and pro-western sympathies for international assistance money and other benefits that the West can not fail to deliver to a self-appointed ally. Meanwhile, "Euro-Atlantic" orientations of Ukraine's political establishment were hardly supported with either sound reform policies or uncompromised defense of human rights and independent media. Increasingly authoritarian ambitions of the second Kuchma administration bode ill for democracy, while social and economic policies of the government clearly favored a small group of unscrupulous politicians-cum-businesspeople collectively known as "oligarchs."

However, the West seemed content with these developments as long as postcommunist elites sought to anchor the country's presumed "Europeanness" in periodically demonstrated shows of hostility to Russia as Europe's "other." Complementing those, were Ukraine's periodic innuendoes to NATO regarding potential membership, and to the WEU regarding Ukraine's readiness for broad political-military cooperation. In the end, it was "the desire of some

Western thinkers and policy advocates to turn Ukraine into a buffer state against a feared (or presumed) resurgence of Russian imperialism” that prompted the USA and its allies to turn a blind eye to the emergence of virtually neo-feudal system of rents in Ukraine’s economy.⁷ Not only Ukrainian, but also western business interests had suffered a tremendous blow, as early investments were pillaged by corrupt state-affiliated elite. The country’s steady slide toward unbridled presidential dictatorship went equally ignored until Kiev’s foreign policy pranks were shown to hurt American security interests directly. Kuchma’s infamous authorization of the clandestine sale of advanced air defense systems to Iraq was, in the hindsight, a natural result of this policy.

A policy of self-conscious “geopolitical bluff,” originally discovered and put to work by Leonid Kravchuk, Ukraine’s first post-independence president, was put to new and broader uses by his successor Leonid Kuchma.⁸ If Kravchuk drew on Ukraine’s geostrategic position primarily to secure the country’s newly gained independence through western recognition of its role in international politics, Kuchma had concentrated on more tangible benefits by linking international aid to the country’s foreign policy posture. Presenting geopolitics as Ukraine’s special key to development was clearly articulated in one of the early addresses of the state that Kuchma had delivered soon after his first election:

The international authority of our state is gaining strength. Its geopolitical role as a factor of stability in Eastern, Central, and Southern Europe is becoming more and more visible. The world increasingly perceives Ukraine as an important factor in European security and development. We must consolidate this tendency.⁹

In the era of increased competition for always limited and nowadays characteristically shrinking pool of western money earmarked for official developmental assistance projects, Ukraine’s decision to capitalize on its objectively given position of a security pivot of Eastern Europe was to be expected. Going for a strategic partnership with powerful external allies would be a choice serving national interests of any geopolitically squeezed, relatively poor and economically vulnerable state with few readily marketable resources. Whether this sort of behavior is opportunistic, self-serving, or motivated by blunt considerations of expediency, as critics tend to allege, is consequently less important. However, it is principally important, whether it brings the desired outcome, what are the payoffs, what are the pitfalls, and whether Ukraine’s international sponsors are able to get their end of the deal right.

Ukraine’s policy of European integration must be subjected to a closer scrutiny with an aim to make sure that it does serve its anticipated practical-political outcomes. The West has both a big stake and a big say in Ukraine’s domestic affairs, and can actually influence them by means of more active foreign policy. The key here is to properly focus western attention on those issues in Ukrainian politics and society that must be addressed first before Ukraine can move on toward establishing closer ties with such western institutions as NATO and the EU. Ukraine’s foreign policy does not exist in a vacuum. Its main objectives and overall direction are shaped in response to a number of domestic and international challenges. It is often used by Ukrainian power holders to compensate for political and economic failures back home. It is imperative to understand how Ukraine’s foreign policy has developed and how it is seen by the country’s political elite in order to make sense of its turns and to anticipate its future course and sustainability.

Explaining Ukraine's Foreign Policy

Ukraine's foreign policy generally speaking and its relations with the West in particular are subject to some controversy. More than one analyst has criticized the conduct and the overall direction of Ukraine's foreign policy mainly for its lack of consistency. On the one hand, Ukraine's "return to Europe," or, as another oft-cited formulation goes, to the family of "civilized nations of the world" had been proclaimed the country's main foreign policy goal as early as 1991, that is, immediately upon its separation from the rest of the former Soviet Union. On the other hand, Ukraine has never developed a pro-European drive even remotely matching those that were early on demonstrated by all of the Baltic states, not to mention such East Central European countries as Poland, Hungary, or the Czech Republic. Instead, it concentrated on maintaining its largely non-transparent business ties to Russia and the rest of the Commonwealth of Independent States, on propping up an obsolete and corrupt system of public administration, on trying to block economic and legal reforms as long as possible, while prolonging existence of the Soviet-style perks and privileges for the top-level bureaucracy.

Judging by the deeds, not words only, the country's post-Soviet rulers did practically everything in their power to move it away, rather than noticeably closer, to its western neighbors. A movement toward free market economy was subverted by the state-sponsored generous handouts to the newly created business oligarchy with intimate connections to the government. Democracy was stifled by de-facto authoritarian powers of the president, which by the late 1990s were applied with increased capriciousness and in almost total disdain of the powers of the elected parliament. Judiciary remained a pocket tool of the executive. The Supreme Court was open to manipulations by the president. The state itself, and the state revenue flows in particular, were parceled into private fiefdoms controlled by presidential cronies. Provincial politics was often determined by murky business deals and relative power of the respective rival gangs with intimate connections to the crime underworld. In short, Kiev's "return to Europe" rhetoric was almost completely defeated by domestic policies that spoke louder than words.

Ukraine's foreign policy under the circumstances was consciously called upon to compensate for glaring failures of domestic policy on practically every direction imaginable. As the country was pushed deeper and deeper into the swamp of postcommunist authoritarianism, institutionalized corruption and open pillage of national assets by presidential cronies, the policy of geopolitical bluff was elevated at the front stage of Ukraine's dealings with the outside world. To beef up Ukraine's self-imposed image of a "guarantor" of security and stability on the continent, official Kiev had found itself in a bad need of an enemy scary enough to frighten those skeptical westerners into unconditional support of Kuchma's increasingly criminalized and unashamedly plutocratic regime. The enemy was understandably found in Ukraine's eastern borders, in Russia, until recently – an "evil empire" in western eyes. Ukraine, Russia's traditional privileged partner in managing common affairs of the former Soviet Union, could now excuse itself as an alleged "ex-colony" of the "imperialist" Moscow. The vices of the former communist regime were now squarely blamed on Russians, while Ukrainians, in a pattern familiar to all East European countries, were posing as innocent victims of the external occupation. The results of these conscious ostracizing of the former partner republic showed themselves up swiftly and conspicuously: in 1996, the \$228 million allocated for Ukraine by the U.S. foreign aid program surpassed the \$148.3 million appropriated for Russia.¹⁰ The policy of geopolitical bluff started bringing tangible dividends – and from this point on had firmly entrenched itself in Ukraine's foreign policy mainstream.

Meanwhile, reforms at home suffered dramatic cutback, and democratic process was actually put in reverse. Ukraine drifted further apart from Europe, even as rhetoric of “European choice” intensified. Interestingly enough, some Ukraine-watchers in the West tended to explain the lack of progress in Ukraine’s European integration by blaming it primarily, if not exclusively, on exogenous factors. Russia’s “detrimental” influences and Kiev’s alleged pro-Russian, or, as some chose to put it, “Eurasian” bias, have been favorite scapegoats. An intuitively agreeable idea that liberal, democratic and pro-reformist orientation at home is usually supported by intense cooperation with the West acquired a completely erroneous twist when Russia was analytically forced into the picture as an alleged antipode of all things “western.”

Following Zbigniew Brzezinski and Henry Kissinger, writers tied to the hawkish circles of the Ukrainian diaspora in the West insist that Russian policy toward Ukraine, and Russian foreign policy generally speaking is motivated by a neo-imperialist agenda.¹¹ They scorn upon the Ukrainian-Russian rapprochement as a sign of Ukrainian weakness that foretells return to the authoritarian controls by Moscow. Russia’s efforts to engage Ukraine in regional cooperation either directly or through the Commonwealth of Independent States are seen as brazen political diktat. Russian businesses’ more than cautious investments into the Ukrainian economy are interpreted as neo-colonialist pursuits stemming from Moscow’s desire to subjugate its neighbors – “to penetrate them economically and thereby gain political influence.”¹² Russia’s concerns over the status of the Russian language in its former sister republic, where until now more than 11 million ethnic Russians live and close to 60 percent of the population use Russian in day-to-day communication as the “language of convenience,”¹³ are decried as chauvinist intrusion into domestic affairs of a sovereign state.

Ukraine, on the other hand, is represented as a perennial victim, a traditional booty in the ages-long competition of continental superpowers, most notably, Russia and Germany. Ukrainian independence becomes, from this standpoint, a value in itself, something that the USA must be willing to support to protect its own geopolitical interests in Europe. In contradistinction, such issues as the concrete nature of Ukraine’s political regime, the relationship between the state and society, the success or failure of democratic reforms, and the overall direction of Ukraine’s domestic policies get considerably less attention and are accorded relatively minor importance. Russia-averse geostrategists would prefer Ukraine run by a corrupt and autocratic government that tramples human rights under foot to a democratic and prosperous, but Russia-friendly Ukraine.

An overarching idea behind all lamentations regarding Russia’s alleged “neo-imperialism” and Ukraine’s alleged victimization by its eastern neighbor is to move Ukraine as far away from Russia as possible, geopolitically as well as culturally, so as to separate one from the other with hard and fast, nearly impenetrable barriers. The practical outcome sought after is motivated by the old geopolitical thinking – to isolate and to lock Russia in the eastern part of the Eurasian continent, where it will be doomed to economic and political oblivion, which it must self-destructively embrace as a sign of its final transformation into what western cold warriors would see as a “normal democratic” (read: a third-rate, internationally insignificant and inactive) state. This state of affairs would presumably benefit “democratic world” and, some dare to add, Russia itself, more than any attempts to restore regional ties with the formerly Soviet neighbors. But would it be beneficial to those very neighbors, Ukraine included?

Some analysts espousing or sympathetic to this line of thought proclaimed diametrical opposition between Ukraine’s European orientation and the country’s friendly policy toward

Russia.¹⁴ Ukraine, according to this view, can only develop as a liberal democratic state and market economy if it erects artificial barriers on its eastern borders. The more Ukraine desires four essential freedoms of movement for its capital, businesses, information, and labor, the more it must guard against these very freedoms in its relations with Russia. An equally false corollary states that the closer the two biggest ex-Soviet states get, the more harm can be inflicted upon their developmental prospects, as if the very fact of doing business together may somehow activate hidden springs of common totalitarian past, thus wresting both states from the ranks of civilized nations of the world and casting them forever into the developmental backwaters of the nowhere land half-way between Asia and Europe. Since these allegations are being made, it is essential to address Ukraine's Russian problem in any study of the country's European policy.

Is Russia a Problem?

Given Ukraine's geostrategic position and the importance of Russian connection for reasons of history, economy, ethnic demography and culture, it is hardly possible to speak of Ukraine's relations with the West without discussing its relationship with Russia. Russia's presence in Ukrainian foreign policy can be detected on more than one level and goes far beyond mere bilateralism. "Without a strategic alliance with Ukraine," writes an influential analyst, "Russia will not become a genuinely great power which would in reality be appreciated, respected and addressed as a real power in the new system of international relations."¹⁵ The post-Soviet "special relationship", inaugurated by Boris Yeltsin, is carried on by Vladimir Putin, who in the midst of the worst political crisis post-independent Ukraine had seen in years called for a "definite stability with our partners," insisting that "we have big plans with Ukraine."¹⁶

Russia's interest in Ukraine is grounded in common political, economic, and ethno-cultural history. At the start of the 21st century, close to 10 million Russians lived in Ukraine, constituting roughly 20% of the country's total population, and more than 4 million of Ukrainians permanently lived in Russia. Up to 5 million Ukrainians annually work in the Russian Federation, where they get a comparatively higher pay. Seasonal migration of Ukrainian citizens to Russia, where they find jobs predominantly in construction, transportation, gas and oil industries, and participate in small-scale cross-border trade, became an important factor of economic life in both countries.

Ukraine is fully dependent on Russia for energy supplies. Up to 70-75 percent of the Ukraine's annual consumption of gas and close to 80 percent of its oil demand are covered by imports from Russia. When the Soviet patronage ended, Russia continued financing up to 22 percent of the Ukrainian GDP with subsidized credits. In 1995, these energy credits to Ukraine by Russia and Turkmenistan exceeded the sum total jointly disbursed by the IMF and the World Bank. The ten-year value of Russian implicit energy subsidies to Ukraine was estimated at \$12.6 billion.¹⁷ Even so, the energy debt to Russia, restructured in 1995 with western mediation, had grown again up to \$1.4 billion by 2003. Since August 2001, Russia and Ukraine has been exploiting a unified electric power grid. At the moment, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan move toward creating a unified economic space as they coordinate their economic policies in a hope to join the World Trade Organization together.

The two countries' defense and security systems are also mutually dependent. Even now, enterprises of the Ukrainian military-industrial complex are connected by myriad links with their partners in Russia. Ukrainian and Russian militaries conduct joint air defense and strategic air force exercises. The Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) and the Ukrainian navy conduct regular

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maneuvers in the Black Sea area. The two countries' air defense systems are mutually exchanging information in an automatic mode. In January 2001 Ukrainian and Russian officials signed a 52-point military cooperation plan that foresees the creation of a joint command post in Sevastopol and a joint rescue detachment of the Russian and Ukrainian BSF.¹⁸

Given this level of mutual interdependence, there is little wonder that Russia is critical when Ukraine's overtures with NATO are being played out behind Russia's back. Sometimes, this criticism translates into an equally suspicious reaction to Ukraine's negotiations with the European Union. Since Russia is not on the short list of the EU candidates, the enlargement of Europe (without Russia) is sometimes perceived in Moscow as a zero-sum game where gains of one side must automatically detract from the other. Russian analysts decry the alleged desire of the EU of "immediate redivision in its favor of the post-Soviet legacy before our country has had a chance to get firmly back on its feet." The expansion is read as a modern-day version of the Cold War policy of containment. While Kiev hopes that the Schengen line can be eventually moved to Ukraine's eastern borders, Russia sees only "warning signals that with the enlargement... Russia could be deprived of its 'residence permit' in the changed Europe and... left outside and on the fringe of the continent, and in an atmosphere that is not necessarily friendly."¹⁹

Russia's apprehension is not totally ungrounded. For some U.S. diplomats and defense planners, Russia still tops the list of the countries that "the United States ought to be concerned about."²⁰ Although such western leaders as German Chancellor Schroeder may show signs of friendliness up to an occasional suggestion that Russia might be eventually allowed to join NATO, more candid analysts (e.g., Zbigniew Brzezinski) prefer to see Russia permanently locked in a subordinate and marginalized "regional third-world power" position.²¹ The focus on "the prevention of the reconstitution of a Eurasian empire" advocated by these analysts encourages centrifugal tendencies in the post-Soviet space as a sign of "westernization." Fixation on presumed dangers of restoration of Russia's regional influence leads right-wing pundits to believe that "Ukraine could be a part of Europe even without Russia, Moscow, on the other hand, could be so only via Ukraine, which determines this country's significance in the formation of the new Europe."²² Hence, the foreign policy recipe they advance for Ukraine – stay away from Russia to demonstrate your western commitments, an advice that Russia quite reasonably perceives as unfriendly.

Moscow's apprehension could be dissuaded were Russia given a chance to test the ground for a potential application to the European or transatlantic structures without having to face certain rejection from the start. Unfortunately, the West has failed to provide the necessary reassurance or to encourage Moscow to at least explore the option seriously for the potential, not wholly improbable future scenario. The US-Russian rapprochement in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attack on America and Russia's decisive support of the US-led antiterrorist campaign, though an unquestionably positive development in its own right, nevertheless could not fully eliminate western suspicion and mistrust of the former antagonist. It is noteworthy that even writers of a liberal persuasion find it difficult to acknowledge that Russia may have a legitimate claim to membership in the European community:

Consider the case of Russia: who wants Russia to share the values (and benefits) of EU membership? Who believes that Russia can share the values of NATO?²³

Conservative commentators admit their "vague dread of Russia's vastness and inscrutability" and allege, in Henry Kissinger's words, that Russia's foreign policy is

“historically” based on desire “to dominate neighbors where they cannot be subjugated.” Historically and structurally similar policies of western powers are promptly excused by their presumed “idealism” (does it refer to colonialism as well?) and “liberalism” (is it to cover a historical experience of slavery, too?):

...while America’s idealism derives from the conception of liberty, Russia’s developed from a sense of shared suffering and common submission to authority. Everyone is eligible to share in America’s values; Russia’s have been reserved for the Russian nation, excluding even the subject nationalities of the empire. American idealism tempts isolationism; Russian idealism has prompted expansionism and nationalism.²⁴

This attitude toward Moscow, crisscrossed with an idea of Ukraine as western hedge against Russia’s resurgent neo-imperialism spoils the two countries’ relations, communicates false impression of western readiness to embrace Ukraine solely on the basis of its demonstrated anti-Russianism, and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in driving Russia further away from the avowed western values it is presumably incapable to grasp.

Ukraine also learns from the experience of formerly socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEECs), whose fast-track integration into NATO and the EU received a small boost thanks to the barely shrouded hostility toward Moscow they had exhibited until very recently. Taking their state-socialist history and present elite’s background into consideration, the NATO membership that CEECs demanded was obviously more than just “another road to prosperity,” i.e., to the eventual membership in the EU. The intrinsic value of association with NATO can only be explained by continuing perceptions of the Russian menace, which some researchers see as essentially independent from Moscow’s good intentions or even behavior. The ubiquitous Russophobia (literally, “fear of Russia”) of small states in Central and Eastern Europe is a phenomenon that is just there, “given Russia’s size and proximity.” Since openly identifying Russian threat as a main rationale for joining the Atlantic Alliance would be politically incorrect and diplomatically sensitive, softer arguments of a cultural character are often used as a proxy. However, even when Central and Eastern Europeans discuss their plans for joining such highly selective western organizations as the EU or NATO in terms of cultural and national identity, “fear and loathing of Russia are in the forefront of their minds.”²⁵

Moscow’s antennas catch this fear and loathing fairly well, associating it, justly or unjustly, with the whole idea of Europe’s eastward movement that Russia may never be able to partake. Ukraine’s joining the chorus led by its immediate western members and the Balts is particularly painful, but also suspect of insincerity for reasons of historical and ethnocultural affinity and intertwined economic interests. However, it must be noted that Ukraine’s eagerness to get easy score points with the West by kicking Russia everywhere it can do so for free and without fear of reprisal would not be as intense or sincere were it not for tacit encouragement of this line of behavior by the West, the USA first and foremost. The net result of this line of behavior, which dominated Ukraine’s foreign policy in 1995-99, was a completely artificial estrangement between two kindred East Slavic states, an unforgivable loss of mutual economic opportunities, and, last but not least, a prolonged and serious souring in relations between Russia and the West.

The idea of a mythical Russian threat to fledgling East European democracies helped justify NATO’s expansion and rejuvenation of its mandate, thus ensuring America’s continuing role and presence in European politics. However, the cost of Russia’s early exclusion from the

European process was by no means negligible: “misapplication of historical analogy” with mid-war Germany led the U.S. administration “to harbor an exaggerated fear of Russia's threat to European security, and to believe that a weak Eastern Europe must inevitably elicit aggressive behavior from both Russia and Germany.”²⁶ It took almost a decade, administration changes in both USA and Russia, the September 11 attack on the USA, and Putin’s sincere endorsement of the U.S.-led antiterrorist alliance to put the unfortunately started trend of Russia’s international isolation in reverse. In the meantime, western perceptions of Ukraine changed, too. The country that used to be viewed as almost a bulwark of democracy on Europe’s eastern borders now gets considerably less western attention than, say, Kyrgyzstan. Kiev’s idea to get into the western exclusive clubs by diligently ostracizing Russia badly misfired.

In most foreign policy declarations and documents that the Ukrainian government issued between 1994 and 1999, the idea of Russian threat to Ukraine’s independence and security was present backstage and justified both Kiev’s pleas for western support against an implied security risk and the concomitant self-aggrandizing assertions of Ukraine’s key importance for peace and security in Europe at large. Meanwhile, Ukrainian public’s view of the country’s most pressing problems was markedly different. While 27.9 percent of the population in 1994 agreed that national security constituted a problem, 36.6 percent worried more about the damage that elite’s foreign policy course could cause to relations with Russia, and the staggering 65.5 percent indicated that their main concern lied with low living standards.

Regarding Ukraine’s participation in the Russia-led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), 75.7 percent opted for continued cooperation, versus only 8.1 percent voting for withdrawal.²⁷ In 1997, one-third of the polled believed that Ukraine should merge with Russia in a single state, in addition to 52 percent of those who preferred seeing the two as “friendly states with open borders.” The share of those who would like seeing Russian as the second official, or state language in the country totaled 46.6 percent, and an even larger share voted for giving Russian same number of hours in education as was given to Ukrainian. The slogans “for friendship and partnership with Russia” and “for a united Slavic state” attracted 46.5 percent and 21.5 percent of the vote accordingly.²⁸

In 1998, 31.3 percent of Ukrainians still believed in desirability of the state unification with Russia, 53.8 percent supported open interstate borders, and only one in ten preferred relation “like with any other state.” The idea of Ukraine’s union with Russia and Belarus attracted 45.7 percent of the public, including 40.4 ethnic Ukrainians and 64.6 percent ethnic Russians.²⁹ Same year, another leading national pollster found that 23.8 percent of the nation supported increased cooperation within the framework of the CIS, and up to 62 percent were unconditionally or generally supportive of Ukraine’s allying itself with the Russia-Belarus bloc. By contrast, less than 13 percent saw relations with advanced countries of the West as a national priority.³⁰

These and other data indicated growing disenchantment of the population with the pro-western course of the political elite. By the late 1990s, the idea of Ukraine’s “European destiny,” which official Kiev continued to promote vigorously on international arena, was perceived with about the same mood as John Maynard Keynes’s famous assertion that “in the long run we are all dead.” For the people more concerned with today’s realities, Ukraine’s “European” boasting smacked of a bad joke, given the country’s official designation as a low-income economy, more than 60 percent drop in GDP since proclamation of independence and an estimated US \$750 GNP per capita in 1999. Judging by the last indicator, Ukraine has found itself in the company

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of Equatorial Guinea (US \$1,170 GNP per capita) and Cote D'Ivoire (US \$710 GNP per capita in 1999).

On the UN Human Development Index, Ukraine ranked 74 out of 162 nations measured in 1999, well below such countries as Uruguay (ranked 37), Libya (59) or Suriname (64). At the same time, Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index for 2001 rated Ukraine among the ten most corrupt countries in the world, placing it on this score between Azerbaijan and Tanzania.³¹ Capricious authoritarianism of the president, the absence of independent judiciary, severe restrictions on freedom of the media, and indications of routine electoral fraud all added to Ukraine's dismal performance at the turn of the century. The 2001 local survey showed that more than 69 percent of Ukrainians believed that their life had gotten worse since independence.³² Apart from the sheer facts of geography, there was very little substance to show for elite's claims, even less, on several indices, than in the neighboring Russia.

And yet, European ambitions of the ruling class did not suffer any setback. On the contrary: throughout the 1994-2000 period, they tended to intensify in inverse proportion to further worsening of the situation at home. There must have been an explanation for that, as well as an explanation for the observable discrepancy between western enthusiasm of the rulers and a consistently lukewarm response to Kiev's western dreams on the part of the electorate. In contradistinction to such countries like Poland, Hungary, or Estonia, Ukraine's European choice has clearly meant different things for elites and masses.

While elites demonstrated certain persistence in pursuing the idea of European integration through the establishment of a special relationship with NATO and numerous attempts to jumpstart an accession dialogue with the European Union, masses paid scant attention to these efforts and continued showing more genuine interest in Ukraine's traditional ties to Russia. Westerly moves of the elite were criticized as betrayal of the country's national interests by left-leaning journalists, who feared Ukraine was being artificially reduced to the status of a semi-developed backwater of international capitalism. The center-right press questioned Ukraine's preparedness to join with Europe and doubted whether western rhetoric of support carried much of a substance. The nationalist right, while claiming an authentically "European" identity for themselves and the ideal-typical nation they purportedly represented, were bitterly critical of both "nationally unconscious" masses and the ruling class that they saw, perhaps not entirely without reason, as a bunch of ex-communist hypocrites. Ukrainian nation at large remained divided as to the best choice of friends in foreign countries, and a significant and growing part of the population could not form an opinion on the issue. There was no shared understanding of what Ukraine's western orientation implied and how it could change the country.

Ukraine and NATO

Ukraine's interest in cooperation with NATO dates back to the first months that followed its proclamation of independence. As soon as it happened, the newly born state had to find a solution to the security dilemma that characterized its relations with other former Soviet republics, Russia first and foremost. Ukraine's proclamation of independence meant that the country was no longer part of a security system centered on Moscow. Indeed, Russia's intentions and behavior vis-à-vis newly independent Ukrainian state became a source of understandable concern. On the other hand, Ukraine had no security guarantees from any other state or alliance and had to rely on its own devices. While going into a new alliance with the postcommunist

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Russia could jeopardize hardly won sovereignty, a no lesser risk of being left out of any security structures whatsoever had prompted frantic search for allies in the West and in Ukraine's immediate vicinity – East Central Europe and the Baltics.

In the meantime, to avoid being drawn into the post-Soviet military alliances spearheaded by Russia, Ukraine had declared itself a non-aligned neutral state. Several analysts noted that Ukraine's declaration of neutrality was from its very inception addressed to Russia, not to NATO or the West generally speaking. Very soon after dissolution of the former Soviet Union, it became obvious that Ukraine was not going to follow in the footsteps of Kazakhstan and other post-Soviet states that joined the Tashkent Treaty on Collective Security. Whether officially non-bloc status played its role in securing such an outcome, is not entirely clear. Russia-averse politics of the post-independent Ukrainian leadership was a potent enough factor and did not require any external aid in the form of declaration of a neutrality to prevent Ukraine's full-fledged participation in the Russia-led Commonwealth. More importantly, officially non-bloc status hurt, rather than helped, almost as soon as it was declared, as Ukraine now sought external allies beyond the borders of the former Soviet Union.

NATO's decision to institutionalize cooperation with ex-communist countries through the establishment of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council could not come any sooner. Ukraine was among the first to join the Council in December 1991. In January 1992, Kiev's "running to the West" was demonstrated in most obvious way when President Kravchuk "mentioned Poland, Hungary, and Canada, but not Russia, as the most likely friends of independent Ukraine."³³ Moscow's barely hidden desire to draw Ukraine deeper into a post-Soviet alliance had only intensified an urge to break free from the Russia-dominated conglomerate of the post-Soviet countries. The 1990 declaration of neutrality adopted as a safety valve against military control from Moscow was no longer enough. A more substantial political and military rapprochement with the West was now increasingly sought both to balance Russian influences and as a means to procure developmental aid and financial credits.

Of all the countries of the post-Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Ukraine was the first to opt for the expanded partnership with NATO. The "Main Directions of Ukraine's Foreign Policy," which was adopted by the Ukrainian parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, in 1993, had introduced an early caveat that came close to negating Ukraine's commitment to non-bloc politics:

In view of the cardinal changes that took place after the USSR's disintegration and which once determined the present geopolitical situation of Ukraine, its declared intention to become, in future, a neutral and non-bloc state has to be adapted to new conditions and cannot be considered as an obstacle for its full scale participation in an all-European security structure.

In the same document, Kiev declared its intention to "set up relations of political and military partnership" with the West as the "defining feature" of Ukraine's foreign policy, pledged to "upgrade the level of its participation in North Atlantic Cooperation Council and North Atlantic Assembly," and envisioned "all-European security structure" based primarily on NATO, EAPC, and WEU.

Around 1994, the state elite in Kiev had come out with an idea of a special relationship with NATO, which subsequently led the country to become one of the first applicants to the NATO's Partnership for Peace program and one of the most active PFP participants since

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Ukraine joined the framework agreement in February 1994. Ukraine had steadily intensified participation through both growing number of activities and finding of new ways to institutionalize cooperation.

A member of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) since its inception and a willing participant to all NATO-led peacekeeping missions in the Balkans, Ukraine had also lobbied for and achieved institutionalization of a special “16+1” (later “19+1”) consultative mechanism with the Alliance and creation of the permanent NATO-Ukraine Commission. In sharp contradistinction to Russia’s reluctant participation in institutions of the Euro-Atlantic partnership, Ukraine insisted on preservation of the bilateral character and self-differentiation as key instruments allowing interested countries to move much closer to the Alliance.³⁴ Kiev’s behavior in this regard echoed the US Secretary of State Warren Christopher’s remark on the PfP’s unique role in giving “NATO the opportunity to evaluate their qualifications for membership ... to judge their conduct, judge their performance, judge their willingness.”³⁵ Though stopping short of openly demanding membership, Kiev has gone to great lengths to underscore its willingness to collaborate with NATO on a wide range of issues. Apart from being a cornerstone element of the country’s strategy for integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures, development of a special partnership with the Alliance was designated as an “important guarantee of [Ukraine’s] national security.”³⁶

Ukraine’s original reasons for cooperating with NATO were not dissimilar to those of other Central and Eastern European countries. While the desire to use the special relationship with NATO as a trump card on the way to the EU was undeniably present, Kiev had also had reasonable security concerns, particularly over Russia’s interest in Crimea in 1994-95. Territorial claims to the Crimean port of Sevastopol, and occasionally to the Crimean peninsula as a whole, were periodically voiced by the State Duma of the Russian Federation until the conclusion of a comprehensive friendship treaty with Ukraine on 31 May 1997. The treaty, which was ratified by both parliaments a year and a half later, had effectively put the Crimean question to rest. However, the question of Sevastopol, where Russia maintains its largest naval base on the Black Sea coast, is bound to resurface, once the current lease agreement is over. Claims to parts of the Ukrainian territory, specifically to the potentially oil-rich Serpent Island off Ukraine’s Black Sea coast, were also advanced by Romania.

There is no doubt that conventional security considerations played a large role in Kiev’s decision to seek powerful friends in the West and to participate in security structures headed by western countries. Ukraine’s joining Partnership for Peace in 1994 was no mere coincidence. President Kuchma meeting with NATO’s Secretary General on 1 June 1995 occurred during continuing tug-of-war over Crimea with the Russian State Duma. As Kiev sought an authoritative statement on the issue by the UN Security Council, it became crucially important to buttress the country’s international standing through the expanded collaboration with NATO. Ukraine’s early security agreement with the Alliance was signed on 13 March 1995. When in Brussels, Kuchma insisted on necessity to move bilateral relations to a new level. The issue was raised again by Foreign Minister Udoenko during his visit on 14 September 1995, when Ukraine formally accepted its Individual Partnership Programme.

To win NATO’s attention, Ukrainian leaders had retracted some of their earlier pronouncements on the matters of European security. At first an opponent of NATO’s expansion, in 1995 Leonid Kuchma enigmatically stated that “we do not strive to join NATO because as of today we are not yet expected to be there.”³⁷ Ukraine’s initial championship of

creation of a formally denuclearized zone in the whole of East Central Europe was soon muted. Instead, the NATO-Ukraine Joint Press Statement of 14 September 1995 noted that

special attention should be paid to strict respect for territorial integrity, existing borders, and rights of persons belonging to national minorities. ... NATO enlargement should be directed at enhancing security of all countries in Europe ... the further development of NATO-Ukraine relations will contribute to enhancing European security.

Following Leonid Kuchma's June 1995 visit, Ukraine became a decisive supporter of NATO's eastern enlargement. A member of the Ukrainian delegation to the Council of Europe linked the idea of Ukraine as western *antemurale* to NATO's enlargement policy, insisting that

NATO must not let Russia determine [its] policy. Membership in the Organization must be decided by NATO members, not by Russia... Ukraine's status... is strategically important for Europe and the whole West from the viewpoint of Ukraine's opposition to the growing expansionism of Russia.³⁸

Soon, Foreign Minister Udovenko participated in the first '16+1' meeting with the North Atlantic Council. The following year, Ukraine signed an implementation paper spelling out relations with NATO in PfP and other areas, and held the first '16+1' consultation at the Political Committee level.

In 1996, frustrated with Russia's intransigence over division of the Black Sea Fleet and the status of Sevastopol, Kuchma chose to scorn Ukraine's neutrality by saying, "We are not Switzerland. We therefore say that NATO should not be closed to any country and we will cooperate with NATO."³⁹ Later same year, NATO Ministerial meeting pledged western support of Ukraine's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty as crucial to stability and security in Europe. NATO ministers saw an important aspect of the emerging European security architecture in the Alliance's cooperation with Ukraine. Security, of course, cannot be faceless, and requires addressing the threat either explicitly or implicitly. As one of the pointers toward Russia, the 1997 Ukraine-NATO Charter contained provisions that reflected Ukraine's uneasiness over continued presence of "foreign" troops on the Ukrainian soil (Art. 17). On the eve of the Madrid NATO summit, where the Charter was signed, Kuchma suggested that "the agreement between Ukraine and NATO should contain provisions which would explicitly confirm that Ukraine's security is important for Europe in general and NATO in particular, and that NATO will not remain a passive observer if situations develop where Ukraine's security will be threatened."⁴⁰

Signing of the NATO-Ukraine Charter on Distinctive Partnership in 1997 had elevated Ukraine's relationship with the Alliance to a new level, launching a veritable whirlwind of activity at home. Ukraine's foreign policy, security and defense planning were clearly adapting to the requirements of the much-wanted "special relationship." The lagging military reform received a most welcome boost, particularly in such areas as retraining of the retired military personnel, modernization of the command and control systems, and civilian oversight of the military. By 1997, Ukraine had established its permanent Mission to NATO. Creation of the Ukrainian Partnership Coordination Cell (PCC) adjacent to the headquarters of SHAPE at Mons, Belgium, facilitated new efforts at military cooperation. The Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Foreign Ministers at the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC) meeting on 9 December 1998, provided for the assignment of NATO liaison officers to Ukraine. On 23 April 1999, a NATO Liaison Officer had been posted to the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense with a mandate to "facilitate and enhance Ukraine's full participation in all co-operation activities

within the framework of the PfP programme and enhance co-operation between NATO and Ukrainian action authorities.”⁴¹ The work of the NATO Liaison Office embraces a wide range of activities under PfP, the NUC, and the Joint Working Group on Defence Reform (JWGDR).

In March 2000, *Verkhovna Rada* approved the Partnership for Peace Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which regularized issues related to the presence of NATO forces on the Ukrainian soil. During the same month, Ukraine hosted the first meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission in Kiev – an event that NATO’s Secretary General Lord Robertson described as ‘a significant step for bringing Ukraine closer to the Euro-Atlantic community of nations.’⁴² The State Program for Cooperation with NATO for 1998-2001 named the Atlantic Alliance “the most effective structure of collective security in Europe” and pledged Ukraine’s continuous efforts to maintain collaboration with Brussels and to improve “interoperability with relevant NATO forces and means.” It stated that, in developing its cooperation with NATO, Ukraine “aims at guaranteeing its independence, democratic development and territorial integrity, strengthening international guarantees of national security, withstanding any emergence of new threats to stability and security in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, where it inalienably belongs.”⁴³

And yet, all visible signs of success notwithstanding, Ukraine’s relations with NATO have not been unproblematic. In the early 1990s, these relations were strained over Ukraine’s backtracking on its earlier commitment to denuclearise. One of the many unwanted consequences of disintegration of the Soviet Union was dispersal of its nuclear arsenal, now found on the territory of four sovereign states, Ukraine included. When the USSR collapsed, Ukraine had by default inherited the third largest contingent of nuclear forces in the world. These forces included 130 ICBMs SS-19, each equipped with six nuclear warheads, and 46 ICBMs SS-24, each capable of carrying up to ten nuclear warheads. Most of the ex-Soviet strategic aviation component was also stationed in Ukraine. This part of “inheritance” consisted of 21 strategic bombers TU-95 and 19 strategic bombers TU-160, plus up to 500 nuclear cruise missiles. Parts of the former Soviet military-industrial complex located in Ukraine included uranium mines and uranium processing facilities, nuclear reactors and scientific institutes. Judging by all appearances, and as a Soviet successor state, Ukraine had all chances to claim a nuclear country status for itself.

While the Alliance countries were committed to prevent this nuclear proliferation by default, the 1992-94 period saw Ukrainian nationalists clamoring to retain nuclear weapons as both the status mark and the best security guarantee that the country could have in its relations with more powerful neighbors. The most obvious alternative – to accept Russia’s strategic leadership in the newly formed Tashkent Alliance – was clearly unacceptable, as civic unrest and ethnic wars were already breeding in former Soviet peripheries. The only other option was to seek security guarantees from NATO or NATO’s individual members – such nuclear powers as France, Britain, and the United States. In 1992, Ukraine had found itself engaged in negotiations with all three nuclear powers of the Alliance, and finally succeeded in getting the assurances it requested.

The 1994 Trilateral Agreement with the USA and Russia, which Ukraine signed under considerable duress, had committed the country to remove all nuclear weapons from its soil and to ascent to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Soon thereafter, it had ratified the START-I treaty in a non-nuclear-weapon state’s capacity. The USA reciprocated with the promise of \$350 million in bilateral economic aid (raised to \$700 million by March 1994), and

by exerting pressure on other G7 members to increase their respective financial assistance to Ukraine. By July 1994, G7 countries had pledged \$4 billion collectively. Ukraine's nuclear weapons were then transferred to Russia, which sent back 100 tons of nuclear fuel for Ukraine's power stations as compensation. Russia was also named as one of the key security guarantors of the newly denuclearised state. By May 1997, it looked like Ukraine's concerns over independence, security and territorial integrity of the country were finally put to rest with the signing of the comprehensive friendship treaty with the Russian Federation, which committed both sides to unconditional recognition of the existing interstate border.

The last batch of nuclear weapons had left the country by mid-1996, and the issue of Ukraine nuclear deterrent seemed resolved once and for all. Nevertheless, attempts to reassess Ukraine's status of a non-nuclear power are periodically undertaken by the country's military experts and polemicists, reverberating across the political spectrum and echoing in the parliament. The question resurfaced again in late 1990s. NATO's war on Yugoslavia had been perceived by many local observers as an indication that sovereignty of a non-nuclear country remains at best conditional.⁴⁴ On March 24, 1999, Verkhovna Rada voted 231 to 46 to ask the government to repeal the country's non-nuclear status and to return to the large-scale production of nuclear weapons. Parliamentary declaration decried "aggressive actions of NATO against the Republic of Yugoslavia" and indicated that, by doing so, NATO had "violated not only international law and general norms of human morality, but also fundamental documents which state that military operations of the Alliance may be conducted only with the purpose of securing the safety of the member states of NATO."⁴⁵ Ukraine had consequently perceived NATO's air strikes on Kosovo, as an official memorandum chose to put it, "with deep anxiety and concern."⁴⁶ Interestingly enough, not only traditionally suspect of the West communists, but also many traditionally anticommunist nationalists, including members of a radical nationalist party UNA-UNSO, had voiced their protests. A public opinion poll conducted by a respected Centre for Peace, Conversion and Foreign Policy of Ukraine revealed that 39 percent of respondents considered USA to represent the biggest possible threat to Ukraine.⁴⁷

Only swift damage control job by the president prevented a quite possible deterioration in the Ukraine-NATO relations. Immediately thereafter, Kiev tried to assume a mediation role in the conflict, and did everything in its power not to antagonize the Alliance countries, the USA first and foremost. In April 1999, Ukraine attended NATO's 50th anniversary summit in Washington, D.C., and joined the chorus of well wishers from East Central Europe. In June 1999, Ukraine denied the use of its airspace to the Russian planes headed for Kosovo's Pristina airport, thus unequivocally siding with the Alliance in a rather delicate and less than fully predictable situation.⁴⁸ Ukraine was quick to declare its solidarity with the U.S. in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on America. In 2002, Kiev has officially announced its intention to become NATO member in not so distant future.

Ukraine's recent pronouncements on desirability of NATO membership de-facto annul its earlier pledges of neutrality and non-bloc status. The State Program for Reform and Development of Ukraine's Armed Forces for the Period till 2005 proclaims a strategic goal of "creation of modern armed forces typified on the Euro-Atlantic model." The State Program for Cooperation with NATO for 2001-2004 reaffirms commitments of its predecessor, adding new dimensions in the sphere of emergency planning, crisis management, standardization and arms procurement. Among the main goals of the ongoing program NATO's "security guarantees of independence, territorial integrity and inviolability of the borders of Ukraine" and the task of "enhancing interoperability between command and control organs, detachments and units of

UAF ... and NATO Allied Military Forces” clearly stand out.⁴⁹

Judging by all appearances, Ukraine has moved into the phase of preparation for the eventual NATO membership. Although the NATO-Ukraine Action Plan adopted in Prague on November 22, 2002 falls short of a full-fledged regular Membership Action Plan (MAP), it does provide an agreed-upon strategic framework for intensified consultations and cooperation on political, economic, military and defence matters. The document commits Ukraine to developing and implementing Annual Target Plans in support of the objectives set out in the Action Plan, including such objectives as strengthening of democratic and electoral institutions, the rule of law, judicial independence, and civil control of the so-called “power ministries.” It specifically commits Ukrainian government to ensure that fundamental human rights and freedoms of citizens are observed and that the necessary measures are in place to fight corruption, money laundering, and illegal economic activities.

A number of recently created bipartite bodies assist in drawing up and evaluating achievement of individual objectives and benchmarks of the Action Plan, particularly in the areas of defence reform (Joint Working Group on Defence Reform), military planning (the Military Committee), emergency preparedness, conflict prevention, environmental protection, and economic security. Ukraine's Annual Target Plan for 2003, which was published on March 24, 2003, suggests some concrete activities in support of the Action Plan's goals. Another recent boost to Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic agenda was given by the May 2003, high-level NATO-Ukraine conference in Washington, D.C., which concentrated on the pace of defence reform and the status of the planned defence review of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, which many analysts see as a tangible step toward conclusion of a regular Membership Action Plan.

When opening the May 2003 conference, NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson alluded to “a rather difficult year” in Ukraine-NATO relations, yet argued that “much of that uncertainty has receded because the Ukrainian Government has made a determined effort to push ahead with its drive for Euro-Atlantic integration.”⁵⁰ If high-level political declarations and the day-to-day work that happens in various units of Ukraine's Ministry of Defence are sound indicators of the things to come, Ukraine is well on its track of joining western military alliance in not so distant future. But is the country prepared for such a commitment? What is the public view of the issue? We will return to these questions later, after surveying the state of Ukraine's relations with the European Union.

Ukraine and the European Union

In answering the question, whether Ukraine's way to pursue its “western orientation” benefits Ukraine's international partners, it is not enough to look just at the material cost of cooperation. A broader perspective will consider such issues as international security and stability, geopolitical interests of the partners, and, to borrow the Eurospeak catchphrase, the spread of an “Area of Freedom, Security and Justice” further east. Still, the material cost matters, and the fact that the cost is borne primarily by Ukraine's international partners matters, too. The United States alone pumped more than \$2 billion into Ukraine in 1991-2001.⁵¹ The ten-year value of Russian implicit energy subsidies to Ukraine was estimated at \$12.6 billion.⁵²

Europe has been more cautious than Ukraine's two major international sponsors. In 1992-95, the European Union's TACIS program for newly independent states benchmarked 236 million ECU in technical assistance to Ukraine. For 1996-99, the volume of assistance was

raised up to 538 million ECU.⁵³ More funds had been committed by EBRD, and still more raised through such channels as G7, IMF, or the World Bank, that is, those international institutions where Europe, although listened to, distinctly follows the American lead. However, as the EU itself goes, its embrace of Ukraine has been conspicuously less enthusiastic so far, especially if Ukraine's East Central European neighbors are brought in for comparison.

When the end of the Cold War confronted the European Community with the question of a potential expansion, a decision was made to develop a new kind of cooperation document that bore only formal resemblance to the Europe Agreement heretofore offered to prospective applicants for membership. Partnership and Cooperation Agreements, extended to Ukraine and some other post-Soviet states, did not address the issue of future membership, carried no formal obligations and overall were largely advisory in nature. Meanwhile, Europe Agreements were offered to East Central European countries with similar state-socialist background.

The decision resulted in Europe's factual division into three groups of states: present EU members, candidates for membership, and non-candidate "partners." Ukraine was left with an impression that European leaders were not prepared to entertain the possibility of Ukraine's becoming a full-fledged member of the European Union. This was a hard blow for Ukrainians who, together with former Foreign Minister and staunch westernizer Borys Tarasyuk, believed that they were no different from "Eastern Germans and other former Warsaw Pact countries... separated from the European mainstream for decades."⁵⁴ To catch up with East Central Europeans, Ukrainian leaders decided to bandwagon by joining the Central European Initiative and launching, together with other countries of the region, the Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation. Kiev had also been a driving force behind the Baltic-Black Sea cooperation initiatives, including the September 1999 summit in Yalta, where Leonid Kuchma pleaded with prospective members of the European Union over the question of potential visa barriers to Ukrainian citizens.

In spite of all fervor on the part of the Ukrainian government, neither EU present members, nor candidate countries had shown much support to the idea of Ukraine's prospective membership. In 1991-92, Europe looked at Ukraine as a Soviet heir par excellence. The main concern was with Ukraine's readiness to carry out those Soviet obligations that could reasonably be seen as falling into its sphere of competence. Internally, Europe's first priority was to deepen integration on the basis of existing membership. Externally, the Balkans, the EU-NATO relations, and the uncertain fate of Russian reforms presented more pressing challenges. The issue of the potential eastern enlargement was pondered in mostly speculative terms. Even so, these speculations did not go much further than the Visegrad trio. The western periphery of the former Soviet Union simply never entered the picture.

Europe was slow to start judging Ukraine on its own merits. In early 1992, a decision to launch Programs of Technical Assistance to Ukraine was adopted. The September, 1992, meeting between Leonid Kravchuk and the President of the EC Commission Jacques Delors had paved the way to formal negotiations on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. On June 14, 1994, Ukraine became the first among the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union to sign such an Agreement, and moved it toward a rather speedy ratification by the Verkhovna Rada in November same year. At the time, the event passed largely unnoticed by the Ukrainian public, which was more preoccupied with triple-digit inflation. For the EU, the Agreement was mostly ceremonial in nature. An institutional fallout of the event did not go much farther than reciprocal opening of diplomatic representations, creation of the Joint

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Ukraine-EU Committee, and regular semi-annual Ukraine-EU meetings at the level of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. The EU interest in Ukraine had been mostly political and diplomatic.

In 1993-97, bilateral relations were dominated by the European concerns over Ukraine's alleged "dumping" of textiles, coal and steel products on European markets. Since economy of the Soviet Ukraine was largely structured by demands of the former Soviet military-industrial complex, the newly independent Ukrainian state could not but inherit production capacities well fit to equip the army, but poorly adjusted for modern civilian consumer tastes. As a result, Ukraine became a rather successful exporter of tanks and military equipment, but could not offer automobiles, consumer electronics, or other high value-added goods for mass consumption. What it could offer to Europe was staple goods, metals, textiles, agricultural produce and chemicals, all exports of the so-called sensitive group, judging by the EU protectionist yardstick. These sensitive goods account for more than two thirds of Ukraine's exports to Europe, and for about one-third of those of neighboring Russia and Belarus.⁵⁵ It is little wonder, then, that the EU had to regularize the issue.

The Agreement between the European Communities and Ukraine on Trade in Textile Products was signed in May 1993, and renewed in December 2000. An agreement between the ECSC and Ukraine for bilateral trade in steel expired on December 31, 2001 and was replaced by a system of autonomous import quotas to the EC. Temporary Agreement on Trade and Issues Related to Trade between Ukraine and the EU was concluded on June 1, 1995. Also in 1995, the Joint Ukraine-EU Committee held its first session, which was fully devoted to discussion of economic matters.

It took some time before the EU had finally granted Ukraine the status of a transitional economy, which somewhat improved Ukraine's terms of trade with European countries. In 1995, Ukraine received \$110 million in credits from the European Union, and additional \$34.7 million in credits from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Next year, the EU had followed with the TACIS indicative program of assistance to Ukraine for 1996-99. The EU/G7 joint action plan on restructuring Ukraine's energy debts had bought the country some time for its sorely delayed reforms. Finally, over the course of ten years in 1992-2002, the EU has become Ukraine's largest donor, contributing €1.072 billion total from the Community funds, and additional €157 million from the member states in 1996 – 1999 alone.

These positive signs notwithstanding, Europe has been in no rush to embrace a newly independent Ukrainian state. By the late nineties, the focus of European concerns had shifted back from mostly economic and environmental issues to mostly political and legal agenda. If at the beginning of the decade Europe could actually buy the idea, oft-cited in Ukraine, of the country's "natural place in the European family among other European nations,"⁵⁶ as the turn of the century approached, it became obvious that Ukraine's "natural" birthright had to be supplemented with more tangible signs of seriousness of integration efforts.

Ukrainians, on their own part, did not excel in propping up their European bid with something more solid than rhetorical declarations of the government. If the postcommunist transitions in East Central Europe had by and large achieved their interim goals by mid-to-late-nineties, same goals remain very much on agenda in the present-day Ukraine. It is no accident, therefore, that Ukraine's Partnership and Cooperation Agreement had not come into force until March 1998. In 1995, Ukraine was also among the first CIS states to be admitted to the Council of Europe. Yet, soon enough it teetered on the edge of expulsion over numerous human rights

violations, death penalty being just one of them. The country's sore problems with freedom of speech had put its president on the list of the worst enemies of free press in the world. Independent observers maintain that both presidential elections in 1999 and parliamentary elections in 2002 were rigged. The use of the so-called "administrative resource" (read: outright pressure by the government) to secure the compliant vote is freely admitted by the country's policy makers. Market reforms have been sluggish, and the changes actually implemented succeeded in pushing the country away from the mainstream of legally bound, transparent market practices that the EU seeks to uphold.

Any unbiased observer of Ukraine's foreign policy orientations sees a double-headed Janus. The government traditionally specializes in wearing a Europe-friendly face, while the people exhibit an aloof, largely disinterested, skeptical, pro-Russian, or, at best, marginally pro-western countenance. On the one hand, Ukraine's determination to apply for the EU membership dates back to the 1993 "Main Directions of Ukraine's Foreign Policy." In 1994, the country's first post-Soviet president Leonid Kravchuk, and in 1996, Leonid Kuchma declared joining the European Union as a key foreign policy priority. On the other hand, sociological polls now and again demonstrate that European identity remains alien or, at best, peripheral to the majority of the population. A deeper look reveals that support to Ukraine's European integration efforts is thin even inside the government. Spokespersons for the elite cannot help but complain that, "at the moment, it is hardly possible to assert that integration with the EU has already taken its due place among priorities of the central government and local administrations."⁵⁷

Ratification of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement has added some speed to Ukraine's European integration efforts. On June 11, 1998, a presidential Decree on Strategy for Ukraine's Integration into the EU was adopted. The decree vested Ukraine's government and public administration officials with the task to meet all preconditions for EU membership by 2007. Ukraine's government departments and individual ministries started drafting sectoral programs of Ukraine's integration with the European Union. The Strategy aims, in its own words, are to "ensure involvement of Ukraine into the European political, economic, and legal space and acquiring on this basis of a status of the EU associated member."

After the presidential elections of 1999, where Kuchma tried to don an image of a vigorous westernizer, Ukraine's "European choice" was elevated to the status of an ersatz state ideology. Associated membership in the EU is now officially proclaimed as "the main foreign policy priority of Ukraine in the middle-term perspective."⁵⁸ All government departments are offered "guidelines to the integration process" which cover such areas as approximation of legislation to the EU standards, liberalization of trade and limitation of protectionist measures, cooperation in foreign policy and security, democratic consolidation, reform of social policy, regional and sectoral cooperation, and protection of the environment. European integration is assertively articulated as a mainstream strategy for the country's political, social, and economic development.

However, both domestic and foreign observers have raised concerns over the fact that there has been no tangible advancement towards Ukraine's meeting any of the Copenhagen criteria for membership. On the contrary, as Ukrainian experts acknowledge, there is a growing feeling of the increasing distance between Ukraine and integrated Europe. This feeling intensifies as "the region of the Central and Eastern Europe, in which Ukraine has traditionally attempted to play a noticeable role, is undergoing stratification into those for whom the European integration has become an item of the current political agenda and those for whom it exists

only as an abstract ideologem. Ukraine belongs to the latter group.’⁵⁹

European skepticism was best demonstrated by the pressure applied to the EU candidate countries in East Central Europe over the question of strengthening border controls with Ukraine, once the Schengen system applies. The more Ukrainians insisted on wiping out last of the dividing lines in Europe, the more convinced the EU countries grew of the necessity to do just that. For one thing, Ukraine’s dismal economic performance has transformed it into a potentially huge source of immigrants that Western Europe is increasingly less willing to embrace. The state-business elite’s unwillingness to reform the country’s economy, which remains very much non-transparent, impenetrable to free market forces and “neo-feudal” in basic mechanics of its functioning, has resulted in downfall of industrial capacity that even a year of efforts by more reform-minded government of Viktor Yushchenko could not bring back to the level of its own former Soviet self. For another reason, Europeans grew frustrated with Kiev’s continued attacks on basic human rights and freedoms, freedom of media being but one, though a prominent example. In a politically oppressed, economically devastated, poor and mismanaged country crime rate is bound to go up, which creates the third reason of why the EU would prefer to keep Ukraine on the other side of the Schengen border.

The prevalent vision in the EU at the moment is that Ukraine, even if an unquestionably European country from historical and geographical points of view, is still a long way to go to be considered for an associate membership. The September 2001 Yalta summit between the European Union and Ukraine revealed open skepticism regarding Ukraine’s European prospects on the part of the EU leaders. While they acknowledged that Ukraine was moving along in economic development, it was impossible to mute criticism with respect to the lack of progress in economic reform. Moreover, at the time of the summit Ukraine remained wide open to rampant corruption of the government officials and their close associates, the notorious Ukrainian “oligarchs,” or politically empowered business people. The EU had also acknowledged that the government in Kiev failed to guarantee conditions for a free and open press. As the EU spokesperson Rejo Kempinen said, "Of these issues, I would say that politically for us the most important thing is that we wish to deliver across a strong message to the leadership of Ukraine that if they are serious about the country's European choice and about putting the recent scandals behind them, they must demonstrate their readiness to do so.”⁶⁰

In spite of all European rhetoric, political system in Ukraine exhibits features that cannot but evoke reminiscences of corrupt oligarchic regimes in less developed regions of the world. The executive’s unquestioned dominance over the country’s politics, well seen in presidential manipulations of the parliament and further reflected in regional subservience to the central administration, is the key issue. The lack of independent judiciary, which at the moment is totally suppressed and intimidated by the presidential administration, is a no less important one. The executive crackdown on all media, which is thereby made to choose between serving as a mouthpiece for the government or going out of business without much hope of coming back, is the third feature that must give Europe a shiver. Against this background, it seems almost a subordinate issue that the present state of Ukraine’s legal system disallows concrete “chapter” negotiations on adoption, implementation and enforcement of various aspects of *acquis communautaire*. The point is that the adoption of *acquis communautaire* requires not only change of many national laws and adoption of the new ones, but also an institutional change of a great magnitude, creation and functional transformation of a number of administrative or judicial bodies which oversee the legislation. Ukraine is presently ill prepared for such a change.

All of these factors add up to an increased feeling of exclusion that the country’s elite

shares with population at large. As Kuchma said, “there is a real fear [in Ukraine] that the old Iron Curtain can be replaced with a different, more humane but no less dangerous Paper Curtain. Ukraine is disturbed about this.”⁶¹ But is it? Kuchma’s own behavior in the scandal over alleged sale of Kolchuga radar systems to Iraq had once again demonstrated that most foreign policy pledges of the Ukrainian elite must be taken with a grain of salt. Perhaps, a study of foreign policy orientations of Ukraine’s general public can provide a better barometer? In the next section, I will address the issue of public preferences, thus moving away from what has been rightly criticized as a bias of excessive personalization of Ukraine’s foreign policy, i.e., its uncritical perception as identical with the government’s policy pronouncements.

How Ukraine’s European Choice Is Seen by Ukrainians

Ukrainian elite sees European integration as a key to the country’s successful capitalist development. There is an almost universal consent on Ukraine’s prospective membership in the EU as a sure road to prosperity. In a sharp contrast to that, political, economic and numerous legal obligations of membership are rather poorly understood and, judging by the mortally slow pace of domestic reform, have never been seriously embraced. Ukraine’s political establishment approaches the whole issue of membership in western institutions in a consciously self-indulgent manner. In doing so, it is motivated by an apparently sincere belief that mere signing of the respective membership agreements would accord Ukrainian rulers same international status, voice, and privileges as those enjoyed by the elected leaders of advanced industrial democracies. On a broader plane of discourse, there is an equally sincere appreciation of membership as a magic key opening floodgates of international aid and investment, both sorely needed to plug the holes left in Ukraine’s economy by more than a decade of plunder by the country’s postcommunist strongmen. Close association between originators of Ukraine’s European quest, political and business leaders centered around the office of the president, and lecherous “oligarchs” primarily responsible for the state-supervised pillage of the economy, is an unfortunate circumstance that has tarnished that quest from its inception.

Among broader segments of Ukrainian population, there is still an apparent lack of understanding of what exactly the country’s “European choice” means and how the proclaimed goal of integration with Europe is to be achieved. Even though 57% of the polled, according to the April 2000 survey, believe that Ukraine needs membership in the European Union, nearly one third of Ukrainians are undecided. It is interesting to note that half of the respondents do not imagine themselves as citizens of a united Europe. A positive answer to that question was given by slightly more than one third of the respondents (37%), while the remaining 15% were hesitant.⁶² Time and again, surveys show that the European identity of the Ukrainian population remains less than fully developed and often loses in comparison to the post-Soviet, Eastern Slavic, ethnic, national, and local identities.

Ukrainian public worries about the potential cost of integration. A quarter of the polled think that Ukraine should avoid financial dependence, which may follow should Ukraine move closer to the EU. Another 23% fear the risk of economic dependence. About 12-13% of the population detest potential imposition of foreign values. About the same number of the polled hate the idea that Ukraine may find itself in the role of a supplicant, an apprentice, or a “junior brother” of more advanced European countries.⁶³

Hesitance of the masses is echoed in politics and policies of the government. More than one observer of Ukraine’s European integration efforts has lamented the lack of enthusiasm

that various departments and levels of the government exhibit when it comes to implementing changes necessary to move the European agenda forward. Domestic analysts note the virtual absence of a “sharp but informed debate on the question of European integration, which would be based on a comprehensive analysis of the benefits and burdens, the pluses and minuses... the pros and cons” of such an integration.⁶⁴ On a more basic level, it is not entirely clear how integration itself is understood – on the level of a process and especially on the level of anticipated outcomes.

The arguments in favor of Ukraine’s integration with Europe are mostly uncontroversial. However, these are the arguments of the elite, which may sound a bit distant from day-to-day problems of common people. First, it is said that Ukraine needs to cooperate with European institutions to promote democracy and market economy, thus serving its own national interests. While few people would argue nowadays that democracy and market economy are generally good things and might well serve population at large, especially in the long run, what is not uncommonly taken as market economy in most post-Soviet countries has harmed the majority of citizens in the first decade after the fall of communism. As democracy goes, multi-party elections, preferable though they might be to the one-party rule, do not bring much of genuine political pluralism to the people who lack financial and organizational resources required for meaningful participation in political life. Add to this numerous “irregularities” of the post-Soviet elections, blatant use of the “administrative resource,” that is, outright pressure of the powers-that-be on local authorities and the electorate at large, sorry situation with freedom of the press, and other well-know distortions of the democratic process in Ukraine, and what might well be taken as democracy by Ukrainian president and his cronies becomes a sad caricature of the latter in the minds of the voters.

Second, the European Union is perceived as potentially a strong trading partner. Ukraine is well aware that common European export and import markets are among the largest in the world. These markets are also among the most coveted by all developing economies. With its population of more than 370 million people, the European Union currently accounts for roughly 18 percent of the world imports and 19 percent of the world exports, comparing to, respectively, 21 and 16 percent for the U.S. markets⁶⁵. As Ukrainian liberal analysts assert, “for any country, cooperation with the EU can provide considerable economic dividends, which in turn promote higher living standards for the bulk of that country’s populace.”⁶⁶ In the Ukrainian business circles, there is a widespread consensus that trade with the European Union is bound to grow. It is less clear, however, whether symmetry in Ukraine’s trade with the EU can be achieved in the foreseeable future, or indeed whether trading with Europe can in the short run be equally beneficial to both sides, as liberal theorists tend to believe.

Indeed, by the start of the 21st century, the European Union became Ukraine’s second largest trade partner, yielding only to Russia and the CIS in importance. The relationship is far from symmetrical, however. While approximately 22 percent of Ukraine’s foreign trade is generated on the EU markets, the EU trade with Ukraine, currently at 0.4 percent of its total foreign trade, is negligible.⁶⁷ Russia and other CIS countries remain Ukraine’s largest foreign trade partners, taking in 35 percent of Ukraine’s exports and accounting for 60 percent of its imports in 2000.⁶⁸ In 1999-2001, EU-Ukraine trade fell sharply down as a result of the 1998 economic crisis in Russia and the CIS. Even so, the EU maintains trade surplus with Ukraine, and the structure of trade, still dominated by raw materials and commodities on the Ukrainian side, versus manufactured goods on the side of the EU, clearly does not favor Ukraine, should the plans of a free trade zone with the EU come to fruition. Only increased foreign direct

investment and thorough modernization of the Ukrainian economy can remedy the problem, as both Ukrainian and European economists acknowledge. Ukrainians lament, however, that the EU's decision to "help Ukraine advance the process of economic reform by enhancing the impact of economic policy advice"⁶⁹ does not go far enough to facilitate FDI at a level that would launch that much needed breakthrough in bilateral economic relations.

Ukrainians believe that associate membership in the EU will automatically guarantee increased levels of financial sponsorship and support to the failing Ukrainian economy. It is true that economic assistance of the EU and its member states to Ukraine is significant. Over the term of ten years since Ukraine's proclamation of independence, the European Community's total assistance amounted to €1,072 billion. Individual member states provided around €157 million in 1996-1999 alone.⁷⁰

The European Union, together with the USA and Canada, remains a powerful magnet for potential Ukrainian migration. Several nation-wide surveys revealed a rather high proportion of potential migrants, particularly among younger and better educated groups of population. For example, the April 1999 survey indicated that one third of respondents were ready to leave Ukraine for another country of permanent residence, should an opportunity present itself. This proportion increased in parallel to the educational attainment level of respondents: from 38% among those with complete secondary education to 46% among professionally qualified specialists. The desire to emigrate was highest among students, 65 per cent of which expressed their willingness to leave Ukraine permanently.⁷¹

It is no wonder that young and better educated Ukrainians are among the strongest proponents of Ukraine's western orientation. According to the 2001 nation-wide poll, the so-called "western vector" of foreign policy was mostly supported by young people and the most educated strata of the population. Yet, even these groups choose the Russian "vector" more often than its alternatives. The Russian "choice" prevails in public opinion of older respondents, residents of Ukraine's eastern and southern regions, and supporters of the parties on the left: the Communists and the Socialists.⁷² Ukraine's lingering sympathies to Russia pose a question for domestic policy makers and international observers alike: should Ukraine's western choice be conceptualized in contradistinction to the policy of furthering the country's manifold ties to Russia? Can Ukraine westernize without Russia – or should the two countries do it together?

Between Russia and the West

Interestingly enough, sociological surveys reveal that the second most popular choice in foreign policy orientations is self-reliance, or more or less clearly pronounced isolationism and parochialism. In 2001, the inward-looking choices of "relying on domestic potential" and "development of Ukraine's regions as priority" trampled the western "vector" in aggregate. A certain fatigue with respect to foreign policy experimentations of the government appeared as a factor that unites otherwise diametrically opposed trends in Ukraine's public opinion. Thus, demonstrated preferences to an isolationist course in foreign policy and demands to more attention to domestic and regional problems were registered across Ukraine's regional spectrum from the West to the East, with the exception of the south-eastern regions and the Crimea, where this attitude, though present, was less accentuated (see Table 1).

Table 1. Regional preferences in Ukraine's foreign policy orientations (%)

Region of residence	1 (relying on CIS)	2 (Russia priority)	3 (join R-B Union)	4 (relns w/ the West)	5 (domestic potential)	6 (regions as priority)
Kiev	23	15	14	42	38	14
Northern	37	19	27	27	31	7
Central	18	19	27	17	24	10
Northeast	25	17	42	19	25	8
Northwest	26	12	9	43	59	8
Southeast	31	26	29	22	19	9
Western	16	7	2	50	43	14
Southwest	19	21	2	33	48	27
Southern	32	29	37	16	11	13
Eastern	24	34	47	14	13	14
Crimea	28	26	44	11	11	8

Source: April 2001 nation-wide poll, conducted by the SOCIS research centre, N = 1200.⁷³

Overall, foreign policy orientations of the Ukrainian population remain staunchly pro-Russian in spite of vociferous propaganda that represents Russian “vector” as something diametrically opposite to Ukraine’s western orientation. Traditional ethnic, cultural and economic ties to Russia that Ukraine has developed over centuries support generally positive image of the northern neighbor. Looking beyond Russia per se, Ukrainians are focused mostly on the East European, or even narrower, the Eastern Slavic field of interaction. With the exception of pro-western pundits and residents of the westernmost borderlands, the majority of the population exhibits little, even if slowly growing, enthusiasm with the pro-western course of the government (see Table 2).

This attitude resonates in the national legislature. Until the March 2002 parliamentary elections, it was largely dominated by the opponents of the pro-western course of the government. Anti-westernism peaked amidst NATO’s Kosovo campaign, when Verkhovna Rada adopted a resolution on the Ukrainian-NATO relations that was sharply critical of NATO’s “disregard... for the established international legal norms and the use of the right of force in international relations” and indicated that “Ukraine's one-sided orientation toward full integration with NATO, imposed by certain forces, and attempts to drag it into this Alliance, which is a military-political bloc, are negatively viewed by a considerable part of the country’s population and complicate relations with CIS member states--above all, with our closest neighbors, the Russian Federation and Belarus.”⁷⁴

Table 2. Foreign Policy Orientations of the Ukrainian Population (%)

What is your preferred vision of Ukraine's political development?	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Closer ties with members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	41	39	32	24	23	19	15	16
Cooperate with Russia; strengthen East Slavic bloc	18	15	14	29	23	29	27	36
Develop the Baltic-Black Sea Alliance	2	0.8	0.9	0.8	–	1	–	–
First of all, develop relations with western countries	13	14	16	14	15	16	17	13
Self-reliance; strengthen independence	13	14	19	16	29	20	26	21
Different regions of Ukraine should choose their own ways	4	4	5	4	–	4	4	3
Don't know, no answer, other	12	13	14	13	11	12	12	10

Sources: *Politychnyi portret Ukrainy 20* (1998): 6; survey data of the research centre Democratic Initiatives (Kiev, Ukraine), representative national polls, N between 1200 and 1810, $p < 0.05$.⁷⁵

The November 2000 survey showed that 40 percent of the polled were against Ukraine's potential accession to NATO, versus roughly one-third of those generally supporting such an aspiration. Foreign policy experts noted that the respondents were substantially more supportive to their country's membership in the EU, which more than half of the polled backed.⁷⁶ The attitude to the EU countries and the European Union institutions is generally positive. In the 2000 survey, only 17% in the aggregate opposed Ukraine's potential membership in the expanded European Union. However, as sociologists noted, some people supported Ukraine's membership in both the EU and the Union of Russia and Belarus (see Table 3).

Table 3. Attitudes Toward Ukraine's Potential Membership In International Alliances.

Should, in Your Opinion, Ukraine Seek Accession to...? (%)

Alliance	Definitely so	Rather yes than no	Rather no than yes	Definitely no	Difficult to say
NATO	11	20	18	22	30
EU	20	36	9	8	28
Russia-Belarus Union	31	21	14	14	20
It should continue to be a neutral country	15	17	20	19	28

Sources: SOCIS Centre for Social and Marketing Research, Kiev, November 2000 nation-wide poll, N=1200, via <http://www.uamission.org/pres-rel/2000/pr-r-0112.htm>, January 3, 2002.

Ukrainians are realists and know who their friends and allies are. The fact that leaders of the European Union give Ukrainian aspirations of membership a short shrift has not passed unnoticed by the populace. The EU's response to Ukraine's European campaign has been frigid from the start, and could only go from bad to worse once facts on corruption and power abuse in Kiev became known thanks to the Melnychenko tapes and numerous reports by local journalists. Meanwhile, Ukrainian-Russian relations have actually improved since the conclusion of the "big" treaty in 1997. While Vladimir Putin's support of the embattled president Kuchma can be lamented, improvements in bilateral trade, stronger and mutually beneficial cross-border ties, and Russia's help in solving Ukraine's energy problems should all be welcome. So must be generally positive climate in diplomatic relations in the regions, which manifests itself both bilaterally and through the medium of the CIS.

It is no surprise, therefore, that in public opinion, Ukraine's national interests point toward a profound rapprochement with Russia. Thus, in 1998, 57 percent of those polled voted in favour of Ukraine joining the Russia-Belarus Union, while up to 66 percent of participants to another survey saw the bilateral Program of Economic Cooperation in unambiguously positive terms, as 'facilitating the expansion of a mutually beneficial, good-neighbourly cooperation of the two allied states and peoples.'⁷⁷ In 1998-2000, a stable 28-30 percent of the total supported Ukraine's ascent to the CIS military union (the Tashkent Treaty), versus just 15-16 percent convinced of the benefits of Ukraine's potential NATO membership and 31-37 percent in favour of equidistance and non-alignment.⁷⁸ Through the first five years of independent existence, a majority of Ukrainians supported awarding the Russian language an official status in Ukraine, a proportion that only slightly declined (to 44-46 percent) in 1997-2000.⁷⁹ On the interpersonal level, indicators of acceptance and trust that Russians enjoy in Ukraine rival those accorded to ethnic Ukrainians (see Table 4).

Table 4. Interethnic Tolerance and Social Distancing in Ukraine, 1994-2000.*

<i>Ethnic and ethno-cultural groups</i>	12/1994 N=2181	10/1995 N=1530	11/1996 N=1446	06/1997 N=1973	11/1998 N=1566	02/1999 N=1533	04/2000 N=1935
Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians	1.70	1.72	2.03	2.27	1.83	1.77	2.07
Russian-speaking Ukrainians	1.78	1.84	2.06	2.34	1.97	1.97	2.32
Russians	1.95	2.06	2.45	2.55	2.25	2.21	2.49
Belarusians	2.32	2.49	3.05	3.18	3.04	2.94	3.13
Jews	3.63	3.74	3.89	3.97	3.96	3.86	4.10
Poles	3.85	3.84	4.16	4.23	4.23	4.20	4.45
Germans	4.03	3.92	4.39	4.30	4.47	4.41	4.69
Romanians	4.27	4.40	4.38	4.51	4.59	4.48	5.03
Gypsies	5.15	5.14	5.15	5.35	5.40	5.46	5.60
<i>Average index</i>	3.60	3.67	3.78	3.85	3.82	3.78	4.06

*The index equals 1 if all respondents would admit representatives of a given group as members of their families, 7 - if all respondents would deny anyone from a given group an entry to Ukraine.

Source: Kiev International Institute of Sociology online report, < <http://kiis.com.ua/>>

An opinion poll commissioned by the U.S. Department of State in 2002 has revealed that 85 percent of Ukrainians have a generally favorable view of Russia, versus only 10 percent who have a generally unfavorable view. The proportion of respondents expressing confidence in Russia's ability to deal responsibly with world problems has risen from around 30 percent in 1995-96 to 64 percent in 2002. Over the same period, the proportion of those who see Russia as a threat to Ukraine's security has fallen from 21 percent to a mere 5 percent.⁸⁰ In terms of foreign policy orientations, 60 percent of respondents went as far as to support some kind of confederal union with Russia and Belarus, while 34 percent remain opposed to the idea. Close to two thirds of the polled support close security relations with Russia and the CIS. A large minority (39 percent with 51 percent opposed) wants to go yet further and merge Ukraine and Russia into a single state.⁸¹

Against this background, western and Ukrainian pundits' insistence on seeing the so-called Russian "vector" in Ukraine's foreign policy as somehow opposite to the "western," or "European" vector looks and sounds completely out of touch with reality. The facts point to a diametrically opposite conclusion. When the Ukrainian deputy prime minister says that Ukraine's way into Europe goes through Moscow, the West is well advised to listen, rather than dismissing the idea as mere "pro-Russia noises coming from Ukraine."⁸²

As things stand now, Russia has moved closer to the West than Ukraine will be able to in the foreseeable future. Despite disagreements with the United States over the war on Iraq, Russia's relations with NATO have dramatically improved since the creation of a new Russia-NATO council in the format of the "20" on May 28, 2002. In the meantime, the Ukrainian president was disinvited from participation in the historic NATO Prague summit over the sale of the Kolchuga passive radar systems to Iraq he allegedly approved in 2000.

Both the USA and the European Union awarded Russia the status of a market economy, thus acknowledging the country's advance on the path of reforms and continuing efforts to secure, in the words of a recent official declaration, "stable socioeconomic development and dignified integration into the world community" for all members of the Commonwealth of Independent States.⁸³ Ukraine's reforms stall, one of the key reasons being elite's unscrupulous interference in the economy. As a recent report by the U.S. Department of State indicates, the last few years of the Kuchma administration were characterized by "the pervasiveness of corruption, connections between government officials and organized crime, and the political activities of organized crime figures" that "often blurred the distinction between political and criminal acts."⁸⁴ Relegation of Ukraine's status as formerly one of the chief recipients of the U.S. foreign aid is indicative of the fact that the United States loses patience with the country's progress.⁸⁵

Ukraine has moved closer to the postcommunist autocracies in Central Asia than to its western neighbours in treatment of human rights and democratic freedoms, freedom of media in particular. Kiev has managed to overdo Moscow in silencing political dissent. While in Russia, according to the last yearly report by international watchdogs of media freedom, "the independent press continued to provide a certain plurality of views," in Ukraine "the government flagrantly violated press freedom and censored the media."⁸⁶

International organizations' concern with the human rights situation in Ukraine stands

out particularly for its comprehensive character. Human rights violations in Ukraine touch upon all spheres of life: from freedom of expression to the right to vote, and from the absence of independent judiciary to discrimination against ethnic minorities, legal harassment, the use of torture in penitentiary facilities, and political murders.

When assessing situation in Ukraine in late 2001, the U.N. Human Rights Committee singled out threats to freedom of expression. It recommended that the government ensure that language rights of national minorities are honoured. The European Union's 2002-03 National Indicative Programme for Ukraine highlighted the need to strengthen independent media, the judiciary, and public administration. The European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights identified Ukraine as a focus country for 2002-04. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination criticized Ukraine for racial profiling, particularly with regards to the Romani population, and called for the development of effective disciplinary measures for officials committing human rights violations. The Council of Europe stressed the lack of an independent judiciary and the absence of progress in resolving cases of murdered journalists.⁸⁷

NATO has declared that Ukraine's proclaimed goal of full integration into Euro-Atlantic security structures remains contingent on "respect for human rights, the principle of separation of powers and judicial independence, democratic elections in accordance with Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) norms, political pluralism, freedom of speech and press, respect for the rights for national and ethnic minorities, and non-discrimination on political, religious or ethnic grounds." To demonstrate its progress along these lines, Ukraine would have to start by adopting "all relevant legislation in pursuit of these policies."⁸⁸ Ukraine's clamour for the associate membership in the European Union is equally impossible without clear evidence of the country's progress in systematic adoption (and implementation) of *acquis communautaire*. For the moment, this evidence is sorely lacking.

As things stand now, Ukraine trails Russia in political and economic development, even if rhetorically distancing itself from Russia. And herein lies the problem. Most pundits see it, but fail to interpret it correctly. It is not Russia that causes Ukraine's troubles. It is Kiev's unique inability to develop a principled policy of its own, basing it on honest recognition of the country's well-established dependence on both Russia and the West. Rhetorical distancing notwithstanding, Ukraine's road to Europe still goes through Moscow – politically, economically, and culturally – although, geographically, it does run in the opposite direction.

Conclusion

Among all of the post-Soviet countries, the Baltics excepted, Ukraine seemed the most promising candidate for a speedy integration into the European community of nations. Its favourable geographic location on the crossroads of major transportation routes in the Baltic-Black Sea area; its territory, roughly the size of France; and its demographic resources (51.5 million people in 1989) all promised a potentially easy adaptation to realities of the market economy.

Instead, a transition proved a long and bumpy road. In the Soviet times, Ukraine was the largest (after Russia) economy among the fifteen Union republics of the former USSR. By 1999, the breakdown of the established economic ties with other post-Soviet states and the badly mismanaged reforms had pushed Ukraine's economic output to fall to less than 40% of its 1991 level. Although Ukraine's GDP had benefited from a sustained positive growth in 2000-2001,

it was not enough to bring the economy fully back to normal.

Privatization was slow and rigged to benefit political insiders, survivors of old *nomenklatura* and managers of the state-owned enterprises. The end result was predictable: rather than creating a strong middle class of newly liberated producers and professionals, it gave rise to a wave of overt and covert criminalization of economy. Several powerful clans of the so-called oligarchs grew accustomed to buttress their economic fortunes with inordinate amounts of political influence over the country's national executive. The oligarchic regime that has run the country since mid-nineties has ruined the country's economy, crippled its social structure, and tarnished its international reputation. By 2000, Ukraine had accumulated \$3.2 billion in external debts, with roughly the same amount brought in as foreign investments total over the eight year period since 1992.⁸⁹ Ukraine's GDP in 2002 barely crawled above one-half of the size it had reached eleven years before.

There are those who would like to blame Ukraine's misfortunes on external factors, Russia being the favourite scapegoat. However, Russia has made no steps whatsoever to destabilize Ukraine's economy or undermine its state-building process. Russia kept calm when Kiev promulgated laws restrictive of the use of Russian language in Ukraine; when, in 1992, Ukraine has nationalized a sizeable chunk of the Soviet Armed Forces stationed on its territory; when Ukraine factually defaulted on payment of its \$ 2 billion energy debt to Russia, and on numerous other occasions. In spite of vigorous opposition in the Duma, Moscow had acquiesced to the transfer of formerly Russian Crimea to the newly independent Ukrainian state – a transfer open to the not unreasonable challenges under the international law. In 1997, the new state of the Ukrainian-Russian relations as relations of fully equal and sovereign states was legally grounded in the comprehensive friendship treaty, which committed Russia to acknowledge territorial integrity of Ukraine in its present borders. Finally, Russia has made no attempts to stop or discourage cooperation between Ukraine and NATO, including cooperation in military affairs, defence and security. Instead, Moscow started an equally intense process of cooperation with the Alliance, which gained a new momentum after tragic events of September 11, 2001 and culminated in the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council at the Rome Summit on May 28, 2002.

A better understanding of the essence of the Ukrainian-Russian relations is crucial for anyone who wants to develop an informed opinion on the prospects and pitfalls of Ukraine's European choice. It is seductively easy, and also plain wrong, to represent Ukraine's European agenda as something diametrically opposite to the agenda of closer, and better relations with the Russian Federation. The "either-or" choice in Ukraine's foreign policy orientations, with its inevitable concomitant – simplistic and ignorant anti-Russianism – is a product of narrow-minded thinking dating back to the era of the Cold War bipolarity. A foreign policy built on harking most hawkish opinions of Russia's professional opponents in the West cannot but generate into the policy of geopolitical bluff which will dupe no one but the very same people who encouraged it in the first place. In the western foreign policy community, only retired Cold War warriors would espouse the "Europe versus Eurasia" mentality, which seems to imply that rhetorical browbeating of Russia and the Russians can be accepted as a substitute for the largely missing European credentials. Most people would request more tangible signs of the acceptance of western values. A steady movement toward implementation of at least some of the Copenhagen criteria for the EU membership would be a welcome indication of Ukraine's real, and not only rhetorical progress on its way "back to Europe."

This paper has argued that Russia is not the source of Ukraine's problems and should not be represented as such. The roots of most Ukraine's problems lie within Ukraine itself. While some of those can be attributed to the Soviet legacies that the country shares with Russia and other post-Soviet states, others have only appeared since Ukraine's proclamation of independence and largely because of actions or inactions of Ukraine's own government. The present regime of oligarchic and rent-seeking capitalism was not installed by external forces. Numerous violations of human rights, systematic oppression of the media, rigged elections, corrupt courts, embezzlement of the state funds by high-ranking officials, creeping authoritarianism and covert criminalization of the state are all sadly recognisable features of Ukraine's domestic life after communism.

Against this background, how serious the rhetoric of Ukraine's European bid can be? How should the West react to Ukraine's vows that there is no alternative to the European integration of the country? On the face of it, the rhetoric of European choice emanating from the state which looks more and more like a typical underdeveloped country in Africa, Asia, or Latin America cannot but provoke a healthy degree of scepticism. However, geographically Ukraine is not in Africa, Asia, or Latin America. After the EU accession of Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia, all countries to which Ukraine is connected by the thousands of ties, the country will sit on the borders of the expanded European Union. Ukraine's geostrategic importance for security and stability in Europe is beyond any doubt, and so is its potential value for about any operation of the enlarged NATO in Europe's vicinity and beyond. Ukraine's significance as the key transit country for the exports of Russian gas in Europe is also well established.

In other words, European and Euro-Atlantic communities do have to take Ukraine seriously. At the September 2001 summit in Yalta the EU had reconfirmed its "commitment to continue support of democratic development, human rights, the rule of law and market oriented economic reforms" in Ukraine, with a view to "strengthening Ukraine's European orientation."⁹⁰ The March 2003 Joint Report, although reflecting a number of the EU's concerns, particularly as relates to judicial reform and implementation of legislation, media freedom, and rights of journalists in Ukraine, has also proclaimed an "intention to consider a new proximity policy" toward Ukraine in the context of the Wider Europe initiative.⁹¹ The NATO-Ukraine Action Plan is based on the premise that "Ukraine and NATO share a common vision of a united and free Europe,"⁹² and Lord Robertson has recently found that, in Ukraine, one can see "a much more realistic appraisal of the problems at hand, and a much more determined effort to tackle them."⁹³

All said and done, the question remains whether this generous assessment of Ukraine's readiness to join with the West is or is not overtly optimistic. What does Ukraine's "European choice" mean for Ukrainians themselves? Does it mean fine-tuning the country's foreign policy to rhetorically rally behind the western flags? Or does it mean embarking at a much more difficult way of genuine reforms at home? If Ukraine is finally ready to embrace western values in practice, and not only in shallow declarations of the government, what domestic social and political forces are capable of achieving this?

Ukraine's present administration is ill suited to lead the country's European integration project. Ukraine's hopes therefore hinge on results of the next presidential elections. Pending the hoped-for change in the composition of the country's ruling class, precious little can be accomplished in regards to the most issues that matter: from transparency in economic and fiscal policies to the real separation of powers and independence of judiciary, to human rights and freedom of the media. Without real advance on these fronts, even the nicest and most

elaborate action plans will fail to move integration an inch forward.

While Ukrainians wait, and hope for the best, getting the Schengen visa does not seem a life priority for the rank-and-file, who make up 99.9 per cent of the nation. These rank-and-file citizens realistically assess their country's relative standing on the international arena and its immediate tasks, opportunities and challenges. They believe that matching Russia's present level of development might be a logical step on Ukraine's way to Europe. For many of this people, cooperation with Russia and closer ties with the CIS are more important than relations with western countries.

Ukraine's policy makers must know better than anyone else that the country's economic ties to Russia are manifold and vital for survival of the economy. Good relations with Russia are equally indispensable for the country's security and its overall status in international relations. By more than one count, strengthening of Ukrainian-Russian relations generally speaking and increased cooperation on various sectoral, horizontal and ad-hoc issues holds major promises for Ukraine's development and, hence, its progress toward the goal of European integration.

It is symptomatic that the two countries have decided to coordinate economic policies in preparation to their accession to the World Trade Organisation. This model of cooperation is instructive and suggests a similar strategy in dealing with Europe. As of recent, Russia has moved on to champion European integration efforts on behalf of all members of the CIS. Russia has come out with an idea of a common market between the EU and former Soviet republics. Russia, in Vladimir Putin's words, has pledged "to work with our colleagues," Ukraine first and foremost, toward "harmonizing our legislation with Europe's" and "toward creating a common economic space together with Greater Europe."⁹⁴ No doubt some pundits will be tempted to interpret this as just another manifestation of Moscow's "neo-imperialist" tendencies. But perhaps, this time around the West should hold Russia to its word and help it to deliver. Given a chance, the strategy of helping Russia to help Ukraine might work. When Ukraine's European choice is no longer presented in such a way as to antagonize Ukraine's largest neighbor and strategic partner, it may start shaping out in the realm of reality. Until then, it is doomed to remain in the realm of political rhetoric.

Notes

¹ Askold Krushelnycky, "Ex-Bodyguard Says There Is No Greater Criminal Than Kuchma," *RFE/RL Weekday Digest*, 27 February 2001.

² FBIS-SOV-2001-0410.

³ While COE and PACE were deliberating, Ukraine's National Television and Broadcast Council revoked broadcasting license of an independent Radio Kontinent, citing an outstanding debt as a reason. The broadcaster attempted a legal appeal, launching what the Council of Europe called a test of media freedom. By the end of December, 2001, the court had opted to postpone the decision, prompting Council of Europe Secretary-General Walter Schwimmer to remark that the move was politically motivated. "Radio Kontinent challenged this decision in court almost a year ago, and no court action has been taken since then," said Schwimmer's statement (*RFE/RL Newslines* 6. 1, Part II, 3 January 2002).

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- ¹⁴ Taras Kuzio, "Slavophiles versus Westernisers: Foreign Policy Orientations in Ukraine," in Kurt R. Spillmann, Andreas Wenger, and Derek Muller (eds.), *Between Russia and Europe. Foreign and Security Policy of Independent Ukraine* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), 53-74.
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