

UKRAINE-NATO:

Summarizing 15 years of a distinctive partnership

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What conclusion should we draw from 15 years of NATO-Ukraine Distinctive Partnership? Shall it be that, like Ukraine, it is not dead yet? Or that its slumber, like Ukraine's, is a prelude to new conditions and new opportunities? Borys Tarasyuk referred to the languor of the NATO-Ukraine relationship, and he was right to do so. Today there is no strategy for Ukraine and no strategy by Ukraine. But how is this languor to be used? That question requires strategic rather than mechanical thought.

The Alliance is at a curious point of its evolution. Eastern enlargement, at least in the near-to-mid term, is not within the bounds of political realism. But this has

been true since the summer of 2008. The new element is that sustained, long-term expeditionary deployments outside the NATO Treaty area are no longer within the bounds of realism either. Alongside this development, there is another: the Eurozone crisis and the introversion it imposes on national and collective decision-making. Those realities frame the question before us: what is NATO's role to be in the future security of Europe? What, for that matter, is the EU's role to be? Ukraine's 1998 State Programme of Cooperation with NATO referred to NATO as 'the most effective structure of collective security in Europe'. Is there such a thing today? Does NATO wish to be that entity today, and does it know how this should be done? Does it have policies to this end or simply programmes, principles and pieties?

Whatever conclusions NATO and the EU draw, they cannot be expected to care more for others than they care for themselves.

Does Ukraine care about itself? Who in Ukraine cares about Ukraine: the leadership of the country, the leaders of the opposition or somebody else? For whom is the national interest a sentient reality and not a cynical term? Even if the answer to these questions once again becomes an impressive one, little will be accomplished without effective national security and defence institutions: institutions which emerged in the early 1990s and in ensuing years (in some cases up to 2006) acquired impressive coherence and competence — but which more recently, under more than one national leadership, have been circumvented, compromised and hollowed out.

Ukrainians decry the "grey zone". But we are forced to admit that those who owe their influence, status and power to the grey zone—which has its own subcultures, sources of wealth and codes

of practice—now exercise a dominant role in the country. And we are obliged to treat their pledges to overcome its pathologies with the utmost scepticism because they can only do this by disempowering themselves.

Ukraine's non-bloc status is a source of contention. But the fact is that between 1991 and 2010 Ukraine was a non-aligned state, and until 2002 it never expressed any other intention. The difference between then and now is that this status was never put in stone. Ukraine's leaders preserved the possibility of NATO membership not just by rhetoric and calculated

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Today we, NATO and Ukraine, do not just cooperate: we are partners.

On the one hand, we are partners in the common struggle against many threats and challenges, such as terrorism and piracy on the high seas. Ukraine, for instance,

will be the first partner to join NATO's counterpiracy operation, Ocean Shield, where Ukrainian servicemen will work side-by-side with NATO allies to safeguard the free passage of goods and to make sure merchant communities feel safe at sea.

Working together as partners, Ukraine has been able to improve the capabilities of its armed forces. Equally, through working together, NATO and the armed forces of Ukraine have achieved a high level of interoperability and integration, allowing Ukraine to make a contribution to international security using multilateral platforms like NATO, and not only NATO, but the EU and the united nations as well.

On the other hand, no less important in our partnership are fundamental values, such as democratic standards and the rule of law enshrined in the NATO-Ukraine Charter on a Distinctive Partnership of 1997. Despite serious concerns expressed by allies at the Chicago summit about the state of democracy and the rule of law in Ukraine, the latter does have at its disposal a powerful instrument to address these areas, namely the Annual National Programme (ANP). The ANP, which is drawn up and implemented by Ukraine, offers the country a comprehensive blueprint for reform and modernization, and helps it reach the highest possible standards in all areas of government and society, including democratic principles and values.

With Ukraine completing three cycles of the ANP and now implementing the fourth, we trust that it will remain committed to the reform process and the underlying values guiding the NATO-Ukraine partnership.



ambiguity, but through a relationship with NATO that was plainly intended to achieve de facto integration short of membership. This was statecraft of an impressive kind. It gave substance to Ukraine's sovereignty, it expanded Ukraine's prerogatives, and it afforded Ukraine real leverage in its relationship with others. Now Ukraine has unilaterally thrown this lever away, and the step could prove as consequential in a negative sense as Ukraine's unilateral nuclear disarmament was in a positive sense.

If Ukraine is to be non-aligned—constitutionally rather than provisionally—then it needs to approach the task with seriousness. As a non-aligned state during the Cold War, Sweden spent more per capita on defence than most NATO allies. The same was true of Switzerland, which like Finland enjoyed formal neutrality on the basis of international treaty commitments. Finland's

system of 'total defence' enables all sectors of government (and a reserve force 20 times the size of the standing army) to be mobilised within 24 hours of an alert. Even the UK (which in nominal terms spends 20 times as much as Ukraine on defence) calculates that in the absence of NATO, sub-

the question whether current military doctrine and national defence programmes are coherent, realistic and equal to the challenge of non-alignment.

Even more serious questions need to be raised about the effectiveness of core institutions and their standing in the country. In 1999, the NATO-Ukraine Joint Working Group on Defence Reform extended its remit beyond the Armed Forces to other force structures. Are the MVS and SBU (Interior Ministry and special service of Ukraine respectively - ed.) more trusted by society today than they were five years ago? What has happened to the corps of experts shed by state institutions over the past several years? What is the status of the military educational system, and what incentives do the more capable junior officers have to stay in their respective services? What role, if any, does civil society play in collaboration with national security structures or in loyal opposition to them?

On becoming Minister of Defence in 2005, Anatoliy Hrytsenko undertook stringent reforms to arrest the commercialisation of defence and the absence of proper budgetary management. Is the Ministry of Defence less of a commercial structure now than it was then? Is it more accountable to parliamentary and expert scrutiny? Are its cash flows less opaque?

In 2006, NATO HQ concluded that Ukraine's armed forces were approaching the standard required for submission of a Membership Action Plan. What verdict would be issued today?

'He who wills the end wills the means'. The problems faced inside NATO and Ukraine are radically different from one another in scale and character. But both need to ponder that axiom more than they do. In both domains, politics frustrates this process, and economics conspires against defence mindedness. But in both, a community of experts and strategic thinkers survive, and their queries and insights deserve dissemination, recognition and discussion. If NATO-Ukraine cooperation stimulates that process, it will serve a positive purpose today and facilitate revival when our slumber ends. If it lapses into formalism and bureaucratic routine, it will add nothing to the sum total of security and happiness in Europe. ■

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stantial year-on-year increases in defence budgets would be essential in order to maintain present commitments. If financed and implemented, Ukraine's 30 per cent defence budget increase for 2012 after years of decline will be praiseworthy in itself. But it begs

15 YEARS AGO.
Leonid Kuchma and
Javier Solana sign the
NATO-Ukraine Charter in
Madrid on July 9, 1997



PHOTO: REUTERS