

The Future of Polish – Ukrainian Relations

Piotr Naimski

Higher School of Business-National Louis University, Nowy S'cz

Speaking about the future gives me a certain freedom, a possibility to speculate, get carried away with one's imagination. In order to do so, however, one should first start with a brief description of the present.

During the last decade of the 20th century, Poland and Ukraine found themselves a part of Senior British Diplomat Robert Cooper's post-colonial chaos. Although Cooper usually makes reference to the post-colonial territories of Africa, the Pacific region and Asia, this term might just as successfully describe the post-Soviet Eastern-Central Europe. There is a wide spectrum of possibilities, beginning with the former East Germany, which was externally overtaken by the Bonn-based Republic, thus joining the Fatherland of Germany. Moving further, one encounters the states as the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, all facing difficulties, yet still having distinct successes to show for. When these three joined NATO in 1999, it was an undisputable turning point, as well as actual proof of the establishing ties forming with the 'normality' of the West.

However, there are also critical cases that might qualify for the 'failed states' category. How else would one describe the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina or Kosovo? And yet somewhere in-between, one finds other Balkan states that are struggling to surpass the crisis. The spectrum also has place to encompass states created with the collapse of the Soviet empire, particularly the ones that were directly incorporated. Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova – the Brussels-based Europeans, with a typical dose of political correctness, and perhaps sarcasm as well, would come to refer to those as the Newly Independent States (NIS).

Regardless of the current organizational advancements, economic condition and developments of political systems, etc., all of the abovementioned states must overcome the chaos left by the Soviet empire, which had taken in its banners and retreated into the boundaries of the Russian Federation. There are several common symptoms of this chaotic transformation, which included: the wild privatization, or a complete lack thereof, oligarchic fortunes that often effectively competed with the state, the lack of social tissue that might be a foundation for political parties, corruption, and mafia-related arrangements. All of these factors were completed with relatively well-functioning individuals or whole structures that subordinated to the headquarters in Moscow. At the beginning of 1990's, anyone willing was invited to enter this state-less vacuum. The vivid example testifying of the particularities of that time is the list of East-German communist intelligence agents, about which the German government would enquire for years in Washington. It is quite clear that a copy of that list is 'available' in Moscow, and elsewhere. The Eastern-Central Europe constituted the Wild Plains of Europe at the turn of the century. Across, on the other side of the Plains in Moscow, the former Soviet empire was trying to recover from its wounds of defeat.

Since such an outcome as the Cold War victory came as a surprise for the West, it was unclear how this success should be accommodated for. There was a lack of a concrete vision and political boldness. Dangerous symptoms of wishful political thinking led to child-like euphoria. For example, Gorbachev was declared the Man of the Decade, Yeltsin was regarded to be the white knight, and Putin began his international career as a sensible liberal. The political void, circumscribed by the Oder, Dnieper and Dvina rivers, as well as by the Baltic, the Adriatic and the Black Sea, was tempting all sorts of trouble-makers. It constituted an advantageous circumstance of helping the weakened Russian state-in-retreat to organize its withdrawal and establish outposts for the future.

Not until the Balkan disaster was there such a moment, which brought reflection in the thoughts of Western politicians. Only then was it acknowledged that a political, or rather a strategic vacuum in Central Europe, would be the cause of future troubles. Although come upon leisurely, the decision to include the ex-Soviet colonies in Central Europe to the sphere of stability and security was finalized. NATO was the first to 'open its doors', with the European Union only then beginning its accession negotiation with the first group of post-communist states. The EU Helsinki summit in December 1999 was to list the candidates for Europe, with the nations of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Cyprus and Malt all included. The independent Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova were recognized as remains of the Moscow's domain.

Although the politicians were eager to produce slogans such as the "continent with no dividing lines," at the same time they did precisely institute the new border lines of Europe. Ever since that time, the management plan for the Wild Central-European Plains is implemented with a degree of efficiency – at least at a formal level. In 1999 the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary became part of the NATO alliance. In 2002 the Prague summit decided to offer membership to Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Slovenia as of the spring 2004. On the other front, ten countries concluded accession negotiations with the EU and will acquire membership on May 1, 2004. Although not included among the ten, Romania and Bulgaria were promised membership around the years 2007-2009. In parallel, the Balkan states, the inheritors of the former Yugoslavia, were offered a special track for joining the EU. Although some problems will have to be faced in bringing Bosnia and Herzegovina or Kosovo to meet the 'standards,' nevertheless it seems probable that around the year 2010 the European border will run along the eastern borders of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Romania. Thus, the NATO-EU 'joint venture' will have the whole continent on its side, with the exception of the former Soviet Union, stripped only of the Baltic States. Ukraine is and will remain on the 'other side' for time being.

This borderline is not, and will not be, a new 'iron curtain.' It will, however, be in the interest of all those on the Western side to foster defense from Eastern, Asiatic, or rather, Moscow-inspired behavior, be it in the economic, political or social realm. We must assure that the borderline allows for freedom of contacts, yet at the same time, giving protection from eastern corruption, mafia, and blurry political activities, etc.

Poland's own problems, deeply rooted in the post-communist chaos, are quite enough to deal with, however. Several days ago, the experts of the European Commission declared that

Poland is properly prepared with the border infrastructure to assume its duties as of May 1. That means there will be a watchtower stationed every 20-25 km, with high-quality electronic surveillance equipment, computerized data-gathering, and professional border guards and duty officers. Nevertheless, many in Poland fear that joining the Schengen agreement may dangerously be delayed. I say these words with a degree of anxiety, as accession to the EU, with all its disagreeable aspects, still offers the advantageous perspective of being formally a part of the Schengen tighter border security system. The source of the aforementioned threats, against which Poland seeks protection, is not so much Ukraine. Rather, they originate further east. The border on the Bug river, with the help of Ukrainian authorities, may become quite similar to the present-day border on the Oder river – being open to friends and impassable for destructive elements. In return, Poland may undertake to support Ukraine in organizing border infrastructure in the east.

As of May 1, 2004, Poland will be part of the Europe described above. They shall join the ‘European family,’ as president Chirac refers to it and, paradoxically, will themselves be facing the threat of political isolation. The endeavor with the dispute over the new constitutional treaty is known only too well. Poland’s firm stand on their support for the American operation in Iraq met with too warm a response across Europe. For quite some time now, the Germans proceed with their traditional policy towards Russia, disregarding that which lies between Berlin and Moscow. And the Russians are only too happy to carry through. To follow, Poland’s smaller neighbors prefer the policy of conciliation to that of confrontation, as far as the European contributors are concerned. And perhaps rightly so, as the crumbs left for the small countries are nevertheless relatively significant. The crumbs left for Poland will not change our condition in any dramatic degree.

Poland’s relations with various European countries are greatly mixed. With Germany they are rather strained. Those with the Czech Republic and Slovakia are rather neutral, while the relations with Lithuania are traditionally filled with suspiciousness. Scandinavia has no real interests in Poland. The Czechs, the Slovaks, the Hungarians and the Austrians, all of whom jointly consider reviving the cooperation in the legacy of the Vienna-Budapest tradition, separate Poland from the Southern Europe.

Although Poland found a special bond in its close alliance with America, being an ally of a great power is not an easy task. Waking up as a vassal state one day may come as an unpleasant surprise to many. The only neighboring country that, in a long perspective, might share our views and have convergent interests is Ukraine. Defining a common plan for action is yet not easy.

First of all, as previously mentioned, accordance to Brussels, Ukraine is not in Europe. For the NIS, and that includes Ukraine, the EU ventured out with an initiative of “Wider Europe – Neighbourhood.” It does not provide a perspective of membership.

Second of all, Ukraine is the easternmost fragment of the Central-European Wild Plains. Recently some even celebrated the 350th anniversary of the Pereyaslav Agreement. During these times, the Ukrainian Wild Plains also had a chance to gain sovereignty but failed, and with time, Moscow took it all. By sheer miracle, the end of the 20th century offered yet another chance - a

prospect of creating and establishing a Ukrainian state entity with the capital in Kiev and an economy that would allow for independent development. For Poland, it is a winning ticket on the lottery of history. I have to admit that back in 1991 I had little confidence in the success of this plan, since I reasoned that Moscow would not allow. Yet, over ten years have passed and the Ukrainian state not only exists, but it recently managed to sign border agreements with Russia. This is a great success, one well worth sacrificing the Sea of Azov and some prestige. Despite the fact that the ambassador-governor resides in Kiev, the Ukrainian oligarchs are younger brothers to the Russians, the Moscow-based KGB and its successors do as they please in Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma surely is not a democrat or even a mildly enlightened satrap, and much of the Ukrainian political parties bring to mind puppet shows, **THE STATE OF UKRAINE STILL EXISTS**. This, above all things, is what is most important.

Finding a solution to such problems is only a matter of time. Living in this region, we all have to face them. The differences lie only in the intensity of negative symptoms. The more further to the East, the greater the demand on ‘normality.’

The prerequisite to the success of Ukraine is primarily the constant will of a significant majority of citizens to build a separate state, one which would be independent of Kremlin, and the furthering of an opportunity to anchor the Kiev-based state in the Western civilization tradition. It is an undertaking to which the West, and thus Poland, must commit themselves. However, the united Europe is too contented and too fearful to take up grounds of dispute with Moscow. Brussels will not compete with the Russians over its influence on Kiev. The only power up to the challenge is America. Convincing Washington to assume a consistent, active policy in this region is difficult, yet, not impossible.

Polish policy towards Kiev is not very coherent. The valid declarative support for Ukraine often did not result in any practical activity, and at times it was considered that the Polish diplomacy in the east should primarily address Moscow. The strategy of Polish policy towards Ukraine must be grounded on the premise that anything that might help further confirm its statehood, support Ukrainian patriotism, build political and social structures, shape independent mass media, and assure economic growth, etc., is in the interest of Poland. Above all, increasing the degree of Kiev’s independence from Moscow is essential.

The path to achieving these goals should be led through preparation and presentation to the Ukrainian counterparts of both long-term programs and incidental undertakings that would allow to take advantage of the NATO and EU structures in joint endeavors. Where it would not be possible, the proposed undertakings should proceed as bilateral cooperation or within the framework of an *ad hoc* ‘coalition of the willing.’ Such initiatives may lead directly to multinational cooperation schemes and, consequently, to the formal entry of Ukraine into the western structures. A prerequisite for such propositions being made must be our conviction that the partners in Kiev will renounce the policy of ‘NATO – yes, but with the Russian Federation’.

Until recently I had held the position that the perspective of further enlargement of NATO, especially with the accession of Ukraine, was filled with disadvantages from Poland’s standpoint. I feared further straining on the unity of the Alliance, and the loss of its fundamental defensive capabilities. With the admission of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, the

politicians within the Alliance would give consideration to the opinions of the military staff, formulating the minimum provisions necessary for sustaining the defensive ability of the enlarged Pact. With the oncoming enlargement, it seems that the military considerations have been completely dominated by the political decision-making. Assuming that the Istanbul summit might open membership opportunity for the Ukraine, Belgrade and the remaining Balkan states, we shall be facing the necessity of reconsidering the means of delivering the obligations taken within the Alliance.

NATO in its traditional form, one that assured allied victory, began evolving immediately after the accession of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. Since then, much has been done to work out the practical details of military operations. Some countries adapt to the new conditions in less time than it took others. Participation in the stabilization mission in Iraq indisputably constitutes a favorable impulse for the adjustment efforts of national armies to meet the modern-day challenges. The presence of Ukrainian contingents within the Polish division in Iraq is an impressive success of the pro-western ideas in Kiev.

Nevertheless, the principal problem remains the strategic vision of the Alliance. The currently intensifying discussion over the plans of considering the stabilization and control over the vast region of the Greater Middle East as constituting a challenge and a strategic goal for the changing North Atlantic Alliance brings about much frustration and even more questions unanswered. It seems clear that, having the well-being of the transatlantic ties in mind, a new goal must be found to supercede the past need of defense from the communist threat. Without a strategic goal, NATO will no longer be of any use.

Should the European partners of America be willing to realize their interests in the region that runs from Central Asia, through the Black Sea, Turkey, Iran, the Persian Gulf, the Middle East proper, Egypt and to Morocco, in concurrence and agreement with the United States, then the new strategy could assure success to the participants. Let us put aside the urging hesitation concerning the feasibility of such an agreement on this issue, and assume that it does exist. It would imply that the Black Sea region would not only constitute a strategically important route for transmitting the Caspian energy resources. It would be the base for the political activity conducted by NATO in the region from Afghanistan to Syria. Turkey would uphold its key strategic position, with a natural consequence being the Black Sea countries participating in the cooperation. Bulgaria and Romania will become members of the Alliance this year. Admitting Ukraine and Georgia would make the Black Sea into a NATO-enclosed body of water. Naturally, achieving this would require holding talks with Russia, yet it may be argued that still preoccupied with gathering strength, Moscow would not be able to stand in the way of such plans.

Cooperation between Poland, Ukraine and Romania would create a favorable position for the power projection by American and North-European allies in case it was needed in the south and southeast. It does not seem impossible to imagine a bridge, composed of British, Norwegian, Danish, Polish and Ukrainian elements, linking the Atlantic with the Black Sea, and further on through Georgia and Azerbaijan with the Caspian Sea. In a project thus outlined, Poland and Ukraine would both become sub-regionally crucial participants in a larger strategic construct. The perspective of such participation, even if only in due time, could give the necessary support

for the pro-western politicians in the Ukraine. Such support is much needed when building an alternative for the dominating Russian influence in their own country.

The possible failure to draw NATO into active political engagement in the region of the Greater Middle East may bring an end to the significance of the Pact and, subsequently, a policy reevaluation in the United States, with Washington unilaterally seeking agreement opportunities with global scope. With such turnout, it seems probable that groundwork would be laid out for the network of bilateral agreements, initiated by Washington with the aim of establishing the Missile Defense System with global range. Japan, Australia, several European states, including Poland, might offer their territories to host the system. With a significant degree of probability, it may be anticipated that, apart from Poland, the participating countries would include, among others, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. It would be in the interest of Poland to convince Washington to incorporate Ukraine into this system. Hopefully this time no one in Kiev will be tempted to make money on the secretly sold Kolchugas.

One way or the other, Poland should consider its strategic goal of creating a defensive alliance together with Ukraine and the United States. Apart from everything else, membership in a given organization often furthers bilateral relations.

Brussels, as I mentioned, is not considering Ukraine for membership in the EU. Leaving it out of the Union is not the Polish interest. A means of establishing special provisions for the cooperation between the EU and Kiev might be designing and implementing the details of a new initiative, the Southeastern Dimension. Having been modeled on the Northern Dimension, which is presently realized by the European Commission, it encompasses the northern-European and the Baltic region. Just as Finns seeking assistance in the difficult relations with Russia initiated the latter, the new initiative originated by Poland and Romania in the southeast might bring Ukraine and the Caucasus closer to the European Union. Assuring consent for this project within the Union institutions will not be easy, and it will become even harder, once the financial detail

Work being undertaken in parallel within the EU, along with the political and military framework, may convince the politicians in Kiev to discard the policy of appeasement towards the Russian Federation.

The above plans hold no guarantee of success. Yet abandoning them will, with near certainty, guarantee that in 10 years Ukraine will sign a new Pereyaslav Agreement with Moscow, which by that time will be well advanced on the path of regaining its power.

I was asked to give a vision of the future. I let myself detach it from the present-day relations between Poland and Ukraine. I did so only because I do not see their present shape leading to anything significantly advantageous. They lack a strategic vision, with the domination of petty trade-offs, taking form of one side conceding to a cemetery in return for a monument, a pipeline in return for steelworks, etc. It is important that we should finally hear the words of apology come from Kiev and Lvov for the massacre in the Volyn, and it is equally important that we should be conscious of the fact that in Poland the Poles, however commanded by soviet agents, murdered Ukrainians, and conducted the 'operation Vistula.' It is also important for us to recognize that Lvov was just a beautiful Polish town, and that there is nothing wrong in

cherishing the memory of Poles who died defending it, also by those who may hopefully one day stand to make the town the intellectual and political center of Ukrainian patriotism. The willingness to cooperate in the future will help us reflect on the past and forgive the sins. That should be for the best.

The vague undertakings behind the Odessa-Brody-P³ock pipeline and the buy-out of Huta Czêstochowa to the Donbas Industrial Complex, treated as *pars pro toto*, have a common denominator in form of the 'Russian hand'. Making the pipeline operational with transports of the Caspian oil is perceived by the Russians as contradictory to their interests. And so, they do everything possible to block the project. At the sidelines of privatizing, the Polish steelworks, through the bid of the Donbas consortium, are the once again vague ties between the Ukrainian company and, among others, the Russian Gazprom.

The strategic consent between Kiev and Warsaw concerning the containment of Russian influences in our countries, could lay the foundations for the rational evaluation of the both projects. The Donbas Industrial Complex, although a large business entity, is not the only enterprise in Ukraine, which might want to invest in Poland. It is certain, that with a degree of good will, partners, which do not raise any doubts can be found, and as such will be met with friendly welcome in Poland as representing the birth of the Ukrainian economic independence.

This reference to the most current event and disputes between our countries should illustrate well the thesis that it is principally the vision and the common understanding of the goal that we need. Practical realization of joint undertakings will, thus, be significantly less straining, and the decisions taken will necessarily be better understood by the public opinion both in Ukraine as well as in Poland.