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Perceptions of NATO in Ukraine

Public perceptions of NATO in Ukraine are determined by very contradictory governmental policy towards NATO as well as diverse and heterogeneous massive of information available. Stereotypes of the past co-exist in public opinion with NATO-optimism of younger generations and educated people. Experts' assessments also differ much from public ones.

President Kuchma's decision to include (in June 2004) and then to exclude (in July 2004) a notion of NATO membership from the *Military Doctrine of Ukraine* is a symbol of official Ukraine's inconsistency.

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There is no common point of view on NATO in Ukraine. This issue is still being strongly debated, including political debates within presidential campaign of 2004.

The favourites (Victor Yushchenko and Victor Yanukovich) try to avoid any statement on NATO taking into account existing uncertainty of public perceptions. Some marginal contenders for presidency (Vitrenko, Basylyuk) build their rhetoric on strong NATO-criticism, exploiting legacy of Soviet myths about NATO as an „aggressive military block“. However their efforts are unlikely to accumulate more than 2 - 3% of votes.

This analysis is based on profound public opinion survey of *Razumkov Centre for Economic and Political Studies* published in *National Security and Defense* journal (Issue 8 (32), 2002, authors - Mykhailo Pashkov and Valery Chaly), *Democratic Initiatives Foundation* and *Taylor Nelson Sofres Ukraine* conducted the poll in December 2002 (1200 respondents polled). Fragments of author's paper *Correlation of the Domestic Policy Processes in Ukraine and its Relations with NATO: Ukrainian Experts' View* (Ukrainian Monitor, October 2002, Policy paper 20/2002) was also used.

Public Opinion

The major problem of public perception of NATO in Ukraine is that development contacts with NATO is in fact a prerogative for the higher echelons of state power - a narrow circle of military and civilian experts. Contacts with NATO are largely developing „behind the scenes“ and are not accompanied by a broad information campaign which in turn explains the low awareness of citizens about the Alliance's activities. Only 1.6% of respondents called the level of their knowledge about NATO high, every fourth - intermediate. Meanwhile, two thirds of citizens either called their awareness about NATO low (49.7%), or had no information about the Alliance whatsoever (19.2%).¹

What are the reasons for citizens' poor knowledge about the Alliance? First of all, the earlier surveys conducted by *Razumkov Centre* and *Democratic Initiatives Foundation* showed that foreign policy issues concerned them far less than the internal social and economic problems. This seems natural for any country. It would be strange, to say the least, if citizens were worried about the progress of implementation of the *PfP Programme* more than about the rate of unemployment and timely pay-

ment of wages and pensions. Second, the authorities do not care to spread unbiased and comprehensive information about the Alliance's activities. In terms of the deficit of information, a significant share of Ukrainian citizens view NATO under the influence of either the distorted stereotypes of the past or the assessments of the Russian media that up until recently have been far from friendly to the Alliance. Therefore, it is no wonder that the public in general is cautiously sceptical about the present state of Ukraine's relations with the Alliance.

How would you evaluate the present state of relations between NATO and Ukraine?, 37.1% of respondents termed it as „stagnant“, 18.9% – as „progressive“. Every twentieth respondent (5.7%) chose the negative assessment – „deteriorated“. The greatest share of the polled (38.3%) declined to give an answer. The level of relations with NATO will be determined not by the scope of pro-NATO rhetoric of the Ukrainian authorities and repeated mention of the importance of Euro-Atlantic co-operation but by the diligent everyday work at approaching the standards of the Alliance.

Compared to the previous years, the attitude of Ukrainians to NATO eastward enlargement is evidently changing for the better. First of all, in eyes of the public, the movement of NATO to the East is no longer perceived as aggressive military expansion threatening Ukraine. While in August 2001, 50.2% of the polled called the enlargement of the Alliance an unfavourable development for Ukraine, for one or another reason, in June, 2002, that indicator fell to 38.3%. Second, the share of those who fear that the Alliance's expansion may get Ukraine involved in a confrontation between Russia and NATO fell drastically, from 26.2% to 9%. Therefore, the public fears of being caught between the Western „hammer“ and the Eastern „anvil“ sharply went down. Third, there is an evident (8.6%) increase in the number of respondents convinced that NATO enlargement is favourable towards Ukraine's process of strengthening the democratic security system in Europe. Fourth, the fears that the process of NATO enlargement may increase Ukraine's dependence on Western powers somewhat increased (by 6.8%).

At the same time, the number of those who are undecided about the Alliance's movement to the East increases. It is evident that in 2002 – 2003 Ukrainians became more uncertain and doubtful about that process than in 2000 – 2001, when the negative stereotypes clearly dominated.

However, the positive shifts in the views of NATO enlargement have not yet been transformed into a support for that process. The relative majority of respondents (41.5%) do not support that process. The share of supporters is 30.3%, a large group of respondents (28.2%) declined to answer. Such a position of the public cannot be attributed only to the poor information about the Alliance. Evidently, people are aware that today, Ukraine lies beyond both the Western and the Eastern models of military-political integration. Earlier surveys conducted by *Razumkov Centre* demonstrated that Ukrainian citizens were unwilling to join the Tashkent CIS Treaty, but integration into the Alliance was also causing doubts.

What does the Alliance, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, bring to Ukraine? First of all, the process of enlargement actually coincides in time and space with the EU transformation – the zone of security, political and economic stability on the continent is expanding. Second, the Alliance’s enlargement conditions – its transformation from a military-political bloc into a more flexible regional security structure. Third, NATO enlargement involving the countries neighbouring on Ukraine will, on one hand, promote Ukraine’s interests in the Alliance, while on the other hand, they will expand the sphere of co-operation with NATO in terms of geography and quality, and strengthen Ukraine’s role in the formation of the new European security architecture.

Ukraine’s public is now less concerned that Ukraine may be involved in a conflict between Russia and NATO. Should this happen, what should Ukraine do?

*How should Ukraine behave in the event of a conflict between Russia and NATO (%)?*²²

Hard to say	12.6%
Unconditionally support Russia	20.8%
Unconditionally support NATO	3.0%
Adhere to a strictly neutral position	40.7%
Mediate to resolve the conflict	22.9%

Every fifth respondent believes that Ukraine should support Russia. Only 3% of the polled are sure that they should support the Alliance. Meanwhile, the absolute majority of the polled is sure that Ukraine should not side with anyone in such a hypothetical conflict: Ukraine should either adhere to a strictly neutral position (40.7%) or act as mediator in the conflict settlement (22.9%).

NATO membership for Ukraine

Given the need for wide public support for the decision to join the Alliance, it is highly important to know, citizens' answers to this hypothetical referendum on the issue stated below.

*How would you vote if a referendum on Ukraine's accession to NATO were held next Sunday? (%)*³

I would abstain	13.7%
Against accession to NATO	32.2%
For accession to NATO	32.0%
Hard to say	22.1%

*Does Ukraine need to become a NATO member? (%)*⁴

Yes	32.3%
No	41.5%
Hard to say	26.2%

How should one assess these results? A third of votes in favour of accession is a decent figure, to start. In some of the countries – present candidates for accession to the Alliance – the level of support at the beginning of the road to NATO was roughly the same. At the same time, it may be assumed that the majority of those who abstained may join the ranks of adherents of accession to the Alliance, provided that co-operation with NATO brings real benefits in the social and economic sphere.

The attitude to the accession to NATO has distinct age differences. According to both *Democratic Initiatives Foundation* and *Razumkov Centre's* data, the share of adherents to the accession goes down with age. The youngest age group (18 – 29 years) has the highest number of adherents, and the lowest number of opponents to accession – 43.4% and 23.6% respectively. They no longer look at NATO through the prism of the Soviet stereotypes. This is a new generation of Ukrainians that believes in united Europe.

What is NATO for Ukrainians?

Data below show contradictory approaches preserved in Ukrainian society as a whole with regards to NATO.

*What is NATO, in your opinion? (%)*⁵

Aggressive military block	34.2%
Defence Alliance	31.8%

Peace keeping organisation	6.8%
Hard to say	26.5%
Other	1.7%

Data collected reflect ambivalence of public attitudes to NATO in Ukraine. Public opinion is still vulnerable to particular cases such as NATO operation in Serbia in 1999 or current war in Iraq which despite the last one is not promoted by NATO.

NATO may be viewed in many different ways, but, first of all, one cannot but reckon with that most powerful military-political bloc in the world forming the core of the European security system, as well as one cannot stop its eastward expansion. Second, Ukraine does not have such a high level of economic and politically beneficial military co-operation with any other international organisation (country). Finally, today, there is no reasonable alternative to deepening co-operation, as was proved by the experience of Ukraine's neighbours, including Russia.

As Pashkov and Chaly conclude, the attitude of Ukrainian citizens to NATO shows positive trends: the Alliance is now more rarely seen as a belligerent warrior. At the same time, the non-admission of NATO forcible acts is evident. In the future, the attitude of Ukrainian citizens to the Alliance will probably depend on trends in its development and avoidance of miscalculations that visibly lowered its authority in the eyes of Ukraine's public in the past.⁶

Ukrainian Experts' Evaluation⁷

Another dimension of Ukraine's perception of NATO is the professional point of view represented by leading foreign policy and security experts. *Centre for Peace, Conversion and Foreign Policy of Ukraine* conducts regular polls among them. In autumn 2002, after the decision on the search for NATO membership was taken by *National Security and Defence Council* (it happened on 23 May 2002), a special expert poll was dedicated to Ukraine-NATO relations.

The NSDC's and president Kuchma's initiatives concerning integration into NATO were estimated by the experts mostly positively but with a certain portion of scepticism. The aggregate amount of those fully recognising the seriousness of this initiative is 16.6%. Most of them are interpreting the change in the Ukrainian policy as a manoeuvre in domestic or foreign relations or as a PR action. That is, supporting the idea of

membership in NATO on the whole, most experts call in question the actual Ukrainian authorities' ability to realise it.

How do you estimate the decision of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine (NSDCU) of May 23 and the President's decree of July 9 on accession to NATO?

Options	%
as an evidence of forming a pro-NATO consensus amidst the Ukrainian elites	8,3
as a demonstrative action aimed at Western consumers	25,9
as a manoeuvre in relations between Russia and the West	35,7
as an evidence of a firm will to reforming after the European model	8,3
as a factor of domestic policy competitiveness	21,8
hard to say	8,3

The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry is as before taken as an outpost of pro-NATO policy, and after the decision of 23 May NSDCU is pretended to a similar role as well (one third of voices in each case). But almost a half of experts think that no state institution is now prepared for effective guaranteeing of Ukraine's approach to NATO.

Activities of which domestic official institution contribute to Ukraine's advance toward NATO membership most of all? (experts could point out up to three options, so the total number of answers exceeds 100%)

Options	%
1. the Supreme Council	5,5
2. the President	22,2
3. the President's Administration	16,6
4. the Cabinet	0
5. Foreign Ministry	33,3
6. Ministry for Defence	16,6
7. NSDCU	33,3
8. SSU (Security Service of Ukraine)	0
9. there is none	44,5

The unconstitutional but exceedingly influential President's Administration has got the largest quantity of blackballs. It looks as if this institution's officials by virtue of not so much ideology as their own activities'

methods are erecting a thick political wall between the territory dependent on them and the West, NATO including.

Activities of which domestic official institution hamper Ukraine's advance toward NATO membership most of all? (experts could point out up to three options, so the total number of answers exceeds 100%)

Options	%
1. the Supreme Council	11,1
2. the President	44,4
3. the President's Administration	55,5
4. the Cabinet	11,1
5. Foreign Ministry	0
6. Ministry for Defence	11,1
7. NSDCU	5,6
8. SSU (Security Service of Ukraine)	11,1
9. there is none	22,2
10. hard to say	5,6

Which factors of social and political life in Ukraine are hampering the country's advance toward NATO membership most of all? (experts could point out up to three options, so the total number of answers exceeds 100%)

Options	%
lack of public opinion support	11.1
restrain of constitutional liberties, human rights; problems in activities of mass-media	50
corruption	55.5
inefficient management of the Armed Forces	16.6
weakness of the civil society	61.1
a gap between the power and the society	50
other: <i>economic crisis, absence of a concept of national development</i>	11.1

*Which factors retard the process of Ukraine's integration into NATO most of all?*** (experts could point out up to three options, so the total number of answers exceeds 100%)*

Options	%
State of Ukrainian Armed Forces	35,5
Russia's position	29,0

Inconsistency of a course chosen by the President and the Government of Ukraine	79,0
The Supreme Council's position	6,5
state of public opinion in Ukraine	32,3
NATO's unpreparedness to regard Ukraine as a potential member	24,2
absence of steadfast democracy	46,7
absence of developed market economy	22,5

Experts are unanimous in definition of inner obstacles in the political sphere as the key ones. The problems concerning the state of the Ukrainian Armed Forces took the second place, those related to the economic troubles – the third, and external factors ended the list.

For professionals it is clear that the problems of internal development, unfinished post-communist transformation are the major obstacles on Ukraine's way towards NATO membership.

Notes:

¹ *National Security and Defense, Razumkov Centre, 8/2002, (2002)*

² *Razumkov Centre's poll, June 2002, (2002).*

³ *Razumkov Centre's Poll, June 2002, (2002).*

⁴ *Democratic Initiatives Foundation poll, December 2002, (2002).*

⁵ *Democratic Initiatives Foundation poll, December 2002, (2002).*

⁶ *National Security and Defense, Razumkov Centre, 8/2002, (2002).*

⁷ *An expert poll was conducted by Center for Peace, Conversion and Foreign Policy of Ukraine between 15 September and 1 October 2002. 120 persons were questioned. The experts represent executive power institutions, state analytical structures, independent think tanks, non-governmental organisations, institutes of higher education, leading mass media.*

Resumé:

Oleksandr Sushko: Ukrajina a jej pohľad na NATO

Príspevok Oleksandra Sushka, riaditeľa kyjevského think-tanku *Centrum pre mier, konverziu a zahraničnú politiku*, prezentuje prieskum verejnej mienky, ktorý uskutočnilo *Razumkove centrum pre hospodárske a politické štúdie, Nadácia pre demokratické iniciatívy a Taylor Nelson Sofres Ukraine* v decembri 2002. Autor ponúka prehľad názorov verejnosti,

ako aj expertnej komunity. Prieskum expertnej mienky uskutočnilo *Centrum pre mier, konverziu a zahraničnú politiku*.

Najzávažnejším determinantom postoja Ukrajincov k NATO je skutočnosť, že kontakty Ukrajiny s alianciou sa rozvíjajú primárne len v úzkom kruhu vojenských a civilných expertov a verejnosť sa k informáciám dostáva len zriedka. Podľa prieskumov len 1,6 % opýtaných označilo svoje vedomosti o NATO za značné a každý štvrtý respondent za čiastočné. Na druhej strane až 49,7 % považovalo svoje znalosti za veľmi slabé a 19,2 % opýtaných tvrdilo, že o NATO nemá žiadne informácie. Podľa autora majú na tento fakt vplyv dva faktory: 1. menší záujem verejnosti o zahraničnopolitickú agendu; 2. nedostatok nezaujatých a komplexných informácií, ktoré by mali šíriť politické elity. Na otázku „Ako hodnotíte súčasný stav vzťahov Ukrajiny a NATO“ 37 % respondentov odpovedalo, že sú stagnujúce; 18,9 % ich označilo za progresívne a iba 5,7 % za zhoršujúce sa. Zvyšok respondentov odmietol na otázku odpovedať.

Aj v dôsledku transformačných zmien aliancie sa ukrajinská verejnosť stále menej obáva, že by mohla byť zapletená do konfliktu medzi Ukrajinou a NATO. V prípade konfliktu medzi NATO a Ruskom, majúci na zreteľni polohu Ukrajiny medzi západným a východným modelom vojensko-politickej integrácie, by každý piaty respondent podporil Rusko, kým NATO by podporili len 3 % opýtaných. Na druhej strane, absolútna väčšina bola za neutrálny postoj Ukrajiny.

V otázke členstva Ukrajiny v NATO panovali značné rozdiely, ktoré súviseli s vekovou štruktúrou obyvateľstva. Zatiaľ čo starší boli viac-menej proti vstupu do aliancie, vo vekovej skupine 18 – 29 rokov bolo až 43,4 % respondentov za vstup, pričom iba 23,6 % proti. Mládež už NATO nevidí cez prizmu sovietskych stereotypov, ale verí v jednotnú a silnú Európu.

Na základe tohto prieskumu možno konštatovať, že postoje Ukrajiny k NATO sa vyvíjajú pozitívnym smerom. Aliancia už nie je vnímaná ako nepriateľ. Čo sa týka budúcnosti, postoj Ukrajincov k NATO bude ovplyvnený vnútorným vývojom na Ukrajine a vyhybaním sa nesprávnym rozhodnutiam jej oficiálnych predstaviteľov, ktoré znižovali ich autoritu v očiach Ukrajincov.

Expertný pohľad je prezentovaný na vzorke významných zahraničnopolitických a bezpečnostných analytikov. Tento prieskum sa uskutočnil na jeseň 2002 a bol venovaný otázke vzťahov Ukrajiny a NATO po tom, čo sa *Národná rada pre bezpečnosť a obranu* rozhodla získať členstvo

v aliancii. Iniciatíva prezidenta L. Kučmu a *Národnej bezpečnostnej a obrannej rady* súvisiaca s integráciou Ukrajiny do NATO bola medzi expertmi vnímaná väčšinou pozitívne, aj keď s určitou dávkou skepticizmu. Väčšina chápala zmenu kurzu ukrajinskej politiky skôr ako PR ukrajinskej vlády, pričom spochybňovala schopnosti ukrajinskej vlády daný cieľ zrealizovať. Experti boli nejednotní najmä v určení kľúčových vnútro-politických prekážok, ktoré majú vplyv na proces integrácie. Za najzávažnejšie problémy brzdiace integráciu považujú nekonzistentné smerovanie ukrajinskej politiky, stav ukrajinských ozbrojených síl a ekonomickú situáciu.

Z uvedeného vyplýva, že vnútorný vývoj a nedokončená postkomunistická transformácia predstavujú najväčšie problémy na ceste Ukrajiny do NATO.