

NATO-UKRAINE PARTNERSHIP

Igor Lyubashenko, Konrad Zasztowt

Looking back at the first 20 years of NATO-Ukraine cooperation, one can state that its development was highly irregular and was largely a function of changes in Ukraine's foreign policy concept. Ukraine has balanced between Euro-Atlantic integration and closer cooperation with Russia both on a declarative and practical level. More recently, both Ukraine and NATO seem to be interested in maximizing the pragmatic effects of mutual relations. Despite this, both sides fail to design a strategy for further development of cooperation in order make it more efficient and constructive.

Historical Background of NATO-Ukraine Relations

The first official contacts between NATO and Ukraine were established in 1991. Soon after obtaining independence, Ukraine joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. In 1994, Ukraine was the first post-Soviet state to join the Partnership for Peace programme. 1997 marked a new period of intensification of cooperation. A Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between NATO and Ukraine has been signed then. It remains the basic document defining legal and institutional framework of mutual relations as well as areas for consultation and cooperation. Moreover, the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC) was established as a special forum of dialogue and cooperation between the Alliance and the government in Kyiv. As a result of will to engage in the Partnership for Peace programme under Leonid Kuchma's presidency, Ukraine sent its troops to join NATO's peacekeeping operations in former Yugoslavia (IFOR/SFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina, KFOR in Kosovo).

In 2002 Ukraine proclaimed NATO membership an official foreign policy goal. It resulted in further deepening of the NATO-Ukraine relations. A NATO-Ukraine Action Plan aimed at supporting Ukraine's reforms towards Euro-Atlantic integration, was signed in November 2002. In order to support Ukraine's NATO membership aspirations that were reinforced by the newly elected President Viktor Yushchenko after the "Orange Revolution", the parties launched an Intensified Dialogue on NATO membership and the process of reforms supporting this aim. The culmination of political rapprochement was achieved during the NATO Bucharest Summit in 2008 when the Allies have declared that Ukraine will become a NATO member in the future.

After Viktor Yanukovich won the presidential elections in 2010, a new stage of relations between NATO and Ukraine has started. Ukraine's foreign policy priorities have been changed radically. A new "non-aligned" (or non-bloc) status was adopted. As a result, NATO membership has been removed from the foreign policy priorities of Ukraine.

Regardless of political fluctuations, the institutional framework of cooperation set by the Charter remains unchanged. The NUC is the main institution steering cooperation activities and providing a platform for consultations between the Allies and Ukraine on security issues of common concern. Joint working groups have been set up under the auspices of the NUC to take work forward in specific areas. Finally, there are NATO offices in Kyiv supporting the cooperation: the NATO Information and Documentation Centre, established in 1997 and the NATO Liaison Office, established in 1999.

The fields of practical cooperation also remain largely unchanged. Ukrainian troops served within Polish-Ukrainian battalion in Kosovo until 2010. Ukraine became one of the non-allied states that joined the ISAF operation in Afghanistan. More recently, Ukraine engaged in NATO's anti-terrorist and anti-piracy operations. Furthermore, a number of mutual exercises took place.

The Impact of the "Eastern Vector" on NATO-Ukraine Relations

The historical background presented above has to be nuanced and complemented by the account on the subsequent Kyiv governments' hesitations, slowdowns and periods of coolness in Ukraine-NATO relations. Among causes of these predicaments in mutual relationship, certainly the most important one was the role of the "Eastern vector" – the Russia's impact on Ukrainian foreign policy. Since the early 1990's Russia has tried to re-establish its zone of influence on the territory of the former USSR, and especially in Ukraine. The latter was perceived by the Moscow's leadership as geopolitically the most important Post-Soviet republic, control over which was a condition of Russia's super-power status. Therefore one of the main Russia's strategic aims was to keep Ukraine within common political and military structures and not to allow the Ukrainian authorities a closer rapprochement with NATO. The Ukrainian leadership had to take Russian pressure into account. Bearing in mind Russia's strong opposition towards Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration, governments in Kyiv

proclaimed its foreign policy “multivectoral”, that is equally directed towards cooperation with the U.S., the European countries and Russia. Moreover, the internal cultural and political division of Ukraine into the Western and the Eastern part of the country also played its role in hampering the Ukrainian-NATO relationship. The Russian-speaking inhabitants of Eastern and Southern regions of Ukraine always sympathised with Russia-led projects of integration of Post-Soviet states and opposed any collaboration with NATO. Social resistance against the latter was especially visible in Autonomous Republic of Crimea, inhabited by a large minority of ethnic Russians. Protests against NATO’s *Sea Breeze* naval exercises and American fleet presence on the peninsula led to cancelation of the drills in 2009.

Nevertheless, Ukraine did not sign the Collective Security Treaty (CST), a military alliance comprised of Commonwealth of Independent States’ members in the years 1992-1993. It did not join the CST Organisation (CSTO) created in 2002 by Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which in Russian ruling elite’s concept was to become a counterweight to NATO military alliance. However, Ukraine did cooperate with CSTO, perceiving such collaboration as an instrument for improving political relations with Russia. On the other hand, relationship with CSTO could not and did not bring any progress in terms of reforms of the Ukrainian security sector, its technological modernisation, development of civilian democratic control and professionalism of military personnel or unit training for participation in joint operations (Razumkov Centre 2012, p. 6).

The weak support of the population for Ukraine’s NATO membership gradually decreased in the last decade. That was mainly the result of Russian political and information pressure. The 2008 Russian-Georgian war was one of the most important factors influencing Ukrainians’ attitudes towards NATO. The event was portrayed in Russian media as the result of NATO’s irresponsible policy towards Georgia. Another crucial reason was the disappointment of the Ukrainian society with the policies of the pro-Western parties, which came to power after the “Orange Revolution.” Characteristically, in the 2010 presidential campaign, even the “Orange” candidate Yulia Tymoshenko did not mention the issue of Ukraine’s relations with NATO. Victor Yanukovich, already as a Prime Minister of Ukraine in 2006, when visiting Brussels declared that Ukraine’s membership in the Alliance is not on the agenda. One of his first moves in foreign policy after winning the presidential election in January 2010, were the April 2010 Kharkiv agreements with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev. According to them, Ukraine was to receive a discount for the price of gas imported from Russia in exchange for

the prolongation of Russian Federation's use of the Sevastopol navy base from 2017 to 2042. Obviously, the signing was a sign of Yanukovich's administration's lack of interest in NATO's membership as the Russian base will be an obstacle for Ukraine's integration into the Alliance.

Ukraine's Changing Position Towards NATO

A new law on principles of domestic and foreign policy was adopted by the parliament in July 2010. According to it, the "non-aligned" status means the lack of membership aspirations considering any military blocks (Verkhovna Rada Ukrayiny 2010). However, the document does not exclude the possibility of cooperation with international security organisations. In particular, the mentioned law proclaims Ukraine's will to participate in the improvement and development of European collective security system, as well as to continue a constructive partnership with NATO and other military-political blocs on all issues of mutual interest. It is worth noting that such approach has also indicated a lack of interest in integration with the Russia-led CSTO. Relations with this organisation have also been reduced to the possibility of cooperation.

Ukrainian authorities continue to regard NATO as the most powerful alliance in the world, which is gradually becoming a global security player. Although the ultimate goal of membership has been rejected, the current government has not made any steps to reduce the degree of mutual relations. It is especially worth noting, taking into account that the ruling Party of Regions traditionally operated with the anti-NATO rhetoric. In practice, the institutional framework established by the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between NATO and Ukraine remains unchanged. In particular, the current priorities of mutual relations continue to be set up in the framework of Annual National Programme, established in 2009. Despite the change in Ukraine's foreign policy, the government did not insist on reviewing any chapter of the document, which refers to political and economic issues, defence and military issues, resources, security issues, or legal issues. This fact may suggest that at least on the declarative level Ukraine regards cooperation with NATO as beneficial for the country's internal development.

Indeed, Ukraine continues practical cooperation with the Alliance. In particular, Ukraine has declared its readiness to continue cooperation during the final phase of the ISAF operation.

Ukraine has also joined a project on training of antidrug experts in Afghanistan and Central Asian countries. Furthermore, immediately after the Chicago Summit the government has supported a presidential decree on providing financial support for Afghanistan in 2015-2017 (\$500 thousand annually).

On the other hand, the most evident evolution of Ukraine's position towards NATO can be observed in the political dialogue. Ukrainian authorities have chosen a more balanced approach to compliance with the democratic values, emphasizing that the country's internal problems should not dominate the mutual dialogue. As a result, Ukraine's changed policy towards NATO can thus be defined as more pragmatic and focused on mutual benefits. Taking into account the recent crisis in relations between Ukraine and its key European partners triggered by doubts about the respect for democratic values in Ukraine, the country has faced a possibility of isolation by the West. In such circumstances, one cannot exclude that the "benefits-oriented" partnership with NATO can be regarded by the Ukrainian authorities in an instrumental way as a channel to maintain contacts with key western counterparts on the highest official level.

Ukraine's changing position towards relations with NATO is influenced by two major factors. First of all it is the above-mentioned "Eastern vector" and Russia's attempts to prevent Ukraine from deepening relations with NATO and recently with the EU. Secondly, Ukraine's relations with NATO remain one of the most sensitive political issues for the Ukrainian society. After Ukraine obtained independence in 1991, the majority of Ukrainian society was continually against the country's membership in the Alliance. Recent polls still confirm this tendency. In May 2012, only 15% of Ukrainian citizens supported the idea of joining NATO, while 62% opposed it. The lack of support is correlated with the lack of understanding of what the Alliance actually is. According to the survey, 42% of respondents are not familiar with the procedures of decision-making in the Alliance and as much as 46% of respondents consider NATO to be an "aggressive imperialistic block" (Demokratychni initsiatyvy 2012).

As a result, playing with the anti-NATO stereotypes has been one of the traditional means of mobilizing public opinion in virtually all Ukrainian elections. From this perspective, introduction of "non-aligned" status can be regarded as a contribution to the stabilisation of Ukraine's domestic political situation, as the issue of NATO membership ceased to be a pawn in the game of Ukrainian political forces (Aleksandrov 2012, p. 34). Indeed, the issue of

NATO membership has been virtually removed from the political debate in Ukraine. This is especially evident ahead of the upcoming elections in October 2012. Only the right-wing opposition Svoboda, which balances on the edge of electoral threshold, openly supports the idea of accession to NATO and highlights the need to require the member states to present clear guarantees and terms for Ukraine's joining the Alliance on favourable conditions. On the other extreme side of the political spectrum, the Communist Party of Ukraine calls for consolidation and consistent implementation of foreign policy that excludes Ukraine's membership in NATO and "other aggressive blocs." The ruling Party of Regions presents a position that is in line with the official policy of Ukraine. According to it, the issue of NATO membership should be regarded in accordance with the results of an eventual referendum. Remarkably, two key opposition political forces – Batkivshchyna and UDAR – do not mention NATO in their programs at all. In general, neither party presents a comprehensive view on the development of relations with the Alliance. The fact that the issue of NATO occupies a marginal place in programs of key Ukrainian parties that have a chance to enter the parliament supports the thesis that the problem is not regarded as essential by the Ukrainian society.

To sum up, Ukraine's position towards NATO is evolving in the direction of less "value-oriented" and more "benefit-oriented." At the same time, such policy is not a result of a national consensus. Lacking appropriate popular support and understanding, it turns out to be an "elite-driven" project that can be modified on *ad hoc* basis in accordance with the current interest of the authorities. Such approach may eventually result in instability in the country's foreign relations.

Chicago Summit Results – Indicators of NATO's Changing Policy Towards Ukraine

NATO pays a significant attention to support and development of its extensive network of partnerships, which reflects the Alliance's attempts to build a global system of cooperative security. NATO's new Strategic Concept adopted at the Lisbon Summit in November 2010 has underlined the bloc's interest and will to further enhance cooperation with partners around the globe in order to face the evolving global security challenges effectively. The document has also marked an attempt to reform the partnerships policy of the Alliance. The general concept was to develop a pragmatic and flexible approach that would provide openness to cooperation with any country "on security issues of common concern" (NATO 2010).

Recent NATO summit that took place in Chicago on May 21-22 has reinforced the mentioned tendencies in partnership policies started in 2010. According to the Chicago Summit Declaration, strengthening the wide range of partnerships was one of the key goals of the meeting. Importantly, the Declaration refers to partners on a significant extent of issues, such as Afghanistan, missile defense, smart defense or cyber defense (François 2012). Furthermore, the Chicago summit demonstrated NATO's attempts to manage its wide network of partnerships in a flexible way. An insight into the meeting arrangement with partners allows to conclude that a logic of "variable geometry" was used to deal with different issues and concerns of different partner countries. In particular, the following meetings reflecting variable sets of common interests took place:

- a meeting with 13 NATO's key partners, defined as those who "recently made particular political, operational and financial contributions to NATO-led operations" (NATO 2012);
- a meeting with partners aspiring for NATO membership, which reaffirmed the continuation of the open doors policy without putting it into the centre of the Alliance's agenda;
- a meeting with partners engaged in the ISAF operation, which highlighted the importance of partnerships of operational nature.

The summit presents a good opportunity to assess the current NATO's position towards Ukraine. Despite Ukraine's "non-aligned" status, the Alliance remains interested in maintaining and deepening cooperation. In practice, during the Summit, representatives of Ukrainian authorities were invited to participate only in the ISAF meeting. This fact reflects the NATO's way of understanding the mentioned common interests that define its policy towards Ukraine. Firstly, the financial crisis has forced most NATO countries, including the United States, to reduce their defense budgets. As a result, potential role of partners as contributors to addressing key security challenges increases. Secondly, participation of partners in NATO operations increases the legitimacy of its actions. It is thus possible to conclude that NATO's approach to partnership with Ukraine also evolves in the direction of pragmatism, and focuses on addressing specific problems.

It would be wrong, however, to say that NATO's current approach to Ukraine is devoid of values. Taking into account that the basic legal and institutional framework of mutual

relations remains unchanged, NATO cannot back down from promoting democratic values. As a result, member states have expressed their concerns regarding “the selective application of justice and what appear to be politically motivated prosecutions, including those of leading members of the opposition” (NATO 2012). Furthermore, bilateral meetings of President Yanukovich during the Summit were dominated by talks about internal situation in Ukraine (Kravchenko 2012). Moreover, NATO officials present their concerns about the Tymoshenko case regularly.

Summing up, it is possible to say that NATO’s approach to partnership with Ukraine is gradually becoming more pragmatic as well. At the same time, the relatively high level of mutual relations defined by the Distinctive Partnership does not allow the Alliance to remove the issue of democratic values from the agenda. It is possible to say that from this perspective NATO’s approach to Ukraine is significantly influenced by the current problems of Ukraine’s relations with the European Union due to the overlapping membership of the majority of Western European states in both organisations.

Conclusions: Dilemmas of Future Cooperation

As it has been mentioned in the previous chapters, there is a consensus on a declarative level regarding mutual interest in further cooperation between NATO and Ukraine. Both parties seem to signal interest in bringing relations to a pragmatic level. However, the scope and depth of future cooperation remain unclear due to several tendencies that may affect further pragmatic rapprochement.

Support for reforms in Ukraine remains one of the priorities of cooperation. Leaving aside the question of democratic development, doubts remain on the readiness and will of the Ukrainian authorities to implement basic reforms in the country’s security sector. After 2010, a significant reduction of institutions and experts responsible for Euro-Atlantic integration took place (Razumkov Centre 2012, p. 6). As a result, professional know-how of the Ukrainian administration deteriorated and the pragmatic approach to cooperation often resembled stagnation. For example, a presidential decree of 10 December 2010 required preparation within three months of a new National Security Strategy of Ukraine. In practice, the document was adopted only in June 2012, along with Ukraine’s new military doctrine.

All the mentioned documents highlight the importance of reforming the armed forces in order to continue their modernization and increase their capability to face the security challenges of the 21st century. Needs for adequate financial resources for this purpose are mentioned as well. The importance of such steps is closely linked with Ukraine's "non-aligned" status, which de facto means that the country has to increase its security expenditures in order to increase its defense capabilities (Razumkov Centre 2012, p. 5). However, the progress in this field remains limited and has been recently criticized by Ukrainian media (see Mendeleev 2012). According to the Chicago Summit Declaration, the Alliance remains ready to assist with the implementation of reforms. The unclear position of Ukraine may eventually hamper further cooperation even on the technical level.

It is hard to expect that NATO-Ukraine relations will develop exclusively on a pragmatic and technical level. It is still unclear, however, where the proper balance between pragmatic and value-driven cooperation should be. The concept of relations as outlined in existing legal and institutional framework seems to be misaligned with the practical side of cooperation. In order to reinforce mutual relations a dialogue is needed on a new strategic vision based on goals for cooperation.

Such an approach would be impossible, however, without taking into account Russia's policies towards its "near abroad." The experience of the last two decades has proven that while at least one of the major security players in Europe regards the relations on the continent in terms of geo-political rivalry, Ukraine as one of the main targets of such rivalry will have to face problems in formulating and executing its security policy in a clear way that excludes ambiguity and balancing efforts.

Sources:

Aleksandrov, Oleg, 2012, *Realiyi i perspektyvy spivrobitnyctva Ukrayiny z NATO v umovah polityky pozablokovosti*, in: *Nacionalna bezpeka i oborona*, No. 2-3 (131-132).

Demokratychni Inicyatyvy, 2012, *Ukrayinci vse shche boyatsya NATO*, http://dif.org.ua/ua/commentaries/sociologist_view/nato_ukrainci_.htm, 09.07.2012.

François, Isabelle, 2012, *NATO Partnerships in Chicago: Assessment*, in: INSS Dynamic Dialogue, <http://inssblog.wordpress.com/2012/05/30/nato-partnerships-at-chicago-assessment/>, 06.06.2012.

Kravchenko, Vladimir, 2012, *Chikagskaya shkola ekonomii*, in: Zerkalo Nedeli, No. 19, 25.05.2012.

Mendelev, Dmitriy, 2012, *Boyevye svyni Salamatina*, in: Zerkalo Nedeli, No. 23, 22.06.2012.

NATO, 2010, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence. Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*, http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_publications/20120214_strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf, 10.07.2012.

NATO, 2012, *Chicago Summit Declaration*, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87593.htm?mode=pressrelease, 10.07.2012.

Razumkov Centre, 2012, *Partnerstvo Ukrayina-NATO: chas usvidomlennya realiy, potreb ta novyh pidhodiv*, in: Nacionalna bezpeka i oborona, No. 2-3 (131-132).

Verkhovna Rada Ukrayiny, 2010, *Zakon Ukrayiny pro zasady bnutrishnoyi i zovnishnoyi polityki*, <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2411-17>, 22.07.2012.

About the authors:

Igor Lyubashenko - graduated from the Higher School of Pedagogy of the Society of Public Knowledge in Warsaw (Faculty of Social Sciences and Philology, Department of Political Science) in 2006. He received a doctoral degree in Political Science from the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University at Lublin in 2010. His professional experience includes implementation of international projects in Ukraine and Moldova as well as academic teaching. His scholarly interests include the external policy of the European Union and political and economic processes taking place in Central and Eastern European states (in particular in Ukraine and Moldova).

Konrad Zasztowt - analyst at the Polish Institute of International Affairs. Previously he worked at the National Security Bureau (2008 – 2010), where he monitored international security issues in the Black Sea and Caspian regions. Graduate of the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology and East European Studies at University of Warsaw. He studied also at Yeditepe University in Turkey (2003-2005). His areas of interest include international relations and energy security issues in the Black Sea region (Ukraine, the Caucasus, Turkey) and Central Asia, ethnic and religious minorities as well as the issue of Islam in the former Soviet Union.