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THE CONCEPT OF NEUTRALITY / NON-ALIGNMENT IN UKRAINE'S POLITICS

The purpose of this article is to analyze the role of neutrality/non-alignment concept in Ukraine's politics during its independence. The author came into conclusion that the implementation of the neutrality/non-alignment policy had extremely ambiguous, even more negative consequences for the existence of Ukraine until 2022, and that this approach will no longer be able to guarantee Ukraine's full security in the context of the ongoing war with the Russian Federation, which has significantly weakened the Ukrainian state in political, economic and military terms.

Key words: *neutrality/non-alignment, NATO, full-scale invasion, Russian-Ukrainian war, armed neutrality*

Formulation of the problem. From the moment Ukraine gained independence in 1991, the choice of its foreign policy orientation has always been the top priority for its political establishment. The Ukrainian political leadership has been maneuvering for years between the idea of neutrality/non-alignment and multi-vectorism, Euro-Atlantic and European integration and Eurasianism. Each of these concepts occupied (and some still occupy) an important place in the political life of the Ukrainian state at a certain stage of its existence, which set scientists the task of rethinking the role of neutrality/non-alignment in Ukraine's politics, taking into account the new geopolitical challenges of our time.

Analysis of current research and publications. A wide range of sources and literature was used to write this article. The topic, which was analyzed in this study, was considered by a number of leading specialists,

namely Ukrainian diplomat A. Zlenko [5], publicist and journalist V. Portnikov [7], S. Sydorenko [10] and P. Gerasimenko [3]. A. Zlenko and P. Gerasimenko in their works investigated the extent to which neutrality/non-alignment corresponded to the interests of Ukraine.

V. Portnikov analyzed the possibility of the Ukrainian state obtaining the status of armed neutrality in the context of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war. No less important is the analysis of S. Sydorenko and his colleague from "European Pravda" regarding the prospects of Ukraine joining NATO, as well as D. Kuleba's article [11] on this issue for "Foreign Affairs".

The source base for writing this article was the text of the "Declaration on State Sovereignty of Ukraine" [4] and the document "On the main directions of Ukraine's foreign policy" [9], as well as the materials of Ukrainian information agencies.

The purpose of this article is to examine the idea of neutrality/non-alignment, its importance in the history of Ukraine and the role of this concept as a guarantee of Ukraine's security before and after 2022.

The main material. To start with, it should be noted that the issue of neutrality/non-alignment in Ukraine's policy is based primarily on its complex history, formed by centuries of foreign domination, geopolitical tension and territorial conflicts. It's also important to mention Ukraine's strategic location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, which has made it a battleground for competing states seeking to control its resources, markets and strategic position. This location forced the West to consider relations with Ukraine specifically through the prism of its relations with the Russian Federation, turning it into the main outpost in front of Eurasia. For example, Zbigniew Brzezinski noted that such a geostrategic location of Ukraine turned it into a "new and important space on the Eurasian chessboard, a geopolitical stronghold" [1, p. 62].

Such perspectives never corresponded to the national interests of Ukraine, because under such circumstances it became only a pawn in the complex geostrategic games of its neighbors. In its turn, the political forces of Russia have always been extremely interested in strengthening their influence on the political course of Ukraine. In reality, this pressure was reflected in the "gas" wars, in limiting the possibilities of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic perspective and in the policy of drawing Ukraine into the Eurasian Customs Union (EACU) of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, and in some other actions [8, p. 128]. Such circumstances forced Ukraine to maintain a more delicate balancing between the Russian Federation and Western states.

It should be emphasized that some experts consider the concepts of neutrality/non-alignment somewhat different in their meaning. Neutrality as a political concept limits the state in interaction with other subjects of international relations through the prohibition of participation in military conflicts and compliance with the norms of humanitarian law during wartime and collective security structures. In its turn, non-alignment gives the state a wider field for maneuver, limiting its activities in the international arena only by banning participation in military blocs [5]. Due to the strengthening of world integration and globalization, the concept of neutrality in its classical interpretation began to recede into the past, gradually transforming into the concept of non-alignment. However, it is very important for any state to understand the meaning of certain concepts that their political leadership wants to use in their foreign policy.

The Declaration on State Sovereignty of Ukraine says that "the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic solemnly declares its intention to become a permanently neutral state in the future, which does not participate in military blocs and adheres to three non-nuclear principles: no to accept, not to produce and not to acquire nuclear weapons" [4]. Here the concept of neutrality is understood as non-adherence to any military blocs, while

neutrality itself is a much broader concept in its essence. In addition, this document is only declarative. In it, the Ukrainian state announced its intention to become a neutral state, but having a desire to do so does not mean that Ukraine thus automatically received the status of a neutral/non-aligned state. In order to achieve this status, it has to be fixed at the official level with a number of documents. An example of this can be the case with the permanent neutrality of Switzerland, which was established by the Treaty of Paris in 1815, gradually turning into a precedent in international law and becoming a legitimate form of existence of this country [5].

Despite Ukraine's desire to become a neutral/non-aligned state, it was also mentioned in another official document that "Ukraine advocates the creation of comprehensive international systems of universal and pan-European security and considers participation in them a basic component of its national security" [9]. It can be understood that the issue of neutrality/non-alignment at that time wasn't an obstacle for Ukraine's full-scale participation in the pan-European security structure.

However, it should be remembered that the issue of neutrality/non-alignment was not enshrined in the Constitution of 1996 in any way, and the National Security Concept of Ukraine of 1997 confirmed the course of our country to join the system of regional and universal security [5]. Thus, considering the lack of clear legal acts that would establish the neutral/non-aligned status of Ukraine, the principle of multi-vectorism was established in its foreign policy in early 2000-s, which received opposite assessments from experts due to the problem of ambiguous relations between Ukraine and Russia [2].

Undoubtedly, heterogeneous Ukrainian-Russian relations, which turned into open military confrontation in 2014 with Russia's occupation of Crimea and its invasion of eastern Ukraine, caused the most problems, and then this struggle continued as a full-scale

Russian-Ukrainian war from February 24, 2022. Zbigniew Brzezinski believed that without Ukraine Russia ceases to be only a Eurasian empire. Under the conditions of the absence of Ukraine within the framework of the influence of the Russian Federation, it could still claim the role of an empire, but it would most likely be an empire of the Central Asian model, involved in the exhausting conflicts with the awakened Asians. If Russia seizes Ukraine, it will gain control over its resources and full access to the Black Sea, thus turning into a powerful imperial state that will encompass Europe and Asia [1, p. 63]. Considering the fact that the imperial leanings of the Russian Federation have never been a big secret, the question immediately arises as to how much the idea of neutrality/non-alignment is relevant for Ukraine right now.

Considering the presence of such a crazy neighbor on the border with the Ukrainian state, which is unlikely to calm down after a military defeat, for Ukraine the maintaining of a neutral/non-aligned status may be too expensive and costly both in financial and human terms. Ukraine has to invest huge amounts of money in the army, to buy and independently produce the latest technologies and to constantly improve and train personnel. Despite the fact that the majority of military investments for Ukraine continuously come from the Western partners, under the condition of officially obtaining neutral/non-aligned status Ukraine will still have to invest a huge part of its budget funds in financing the armed forces. No more than 5% of Ukraine's GDP can go to the armed forces; even 20% under the condition of neutrality/non-alignment will not be enough, even considering the significantly weakened potential of the Russian Federation to wage long-term wars [3]. Undoubtedly, these costs will be much larger compared to the investment of funds by the Ukrainian authorities in other spheres of the state's life such as health care, education, social support of the population etc.

Quite often in this context it's said that Ukraine has every chance to turn into so-called

Eastern European Israel, which will be able to independently defend itself from Russia. Despite the fact that the comparison of Ukraine with Israel is quite interesting and to a certain extent justified, Israel has been living in a state of constant military struggle since its appearance and for this state it is also difficult to bear the burden of large military expenses. Of course, if Ukrainians are ready to live under such difficult conditions in a long perspective, then a neutral/non-aligned status for Ukraine is possible. According to Ukrainian journalist Vitaly Portnikov, this status is possible but "without any binding guarantees from the West" [7]. He especially emphasized that the proposed analogues of security for Ukraine from the Western partners are not equivalent to Article 5 of NATO. NATO in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war has proven its effectiveness within the framework of its obligations to its members, due to which the creation of a new system of European security architecture is not relevant [7]. In such circumstances Ukraine can always cooperate more closely with individual members of the alliance or create its own small cooperation groups, such as the London-Kyiv-Ankara axis, but if after some time Russia decides to attack Ukraine again, it will again have to fight alone and rely exclusively on military and political support from the West.

While giving a speech in the Parliament of Norway in March 2022, the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky noted that "freedom should be armed no worse than tyranny", calling on Norway to provide our country with means of defeating armored vehicles, artillery systems and anti-aircraft defense [6]. And indeed, if Ukraine officially receives neutral/non-aligned status, it can only be ***armed neutrality with the strongest army on the continent***. In such case, Ukraine has all chances to turn into an Eastern European Israel, but Israel during the first five years of its independence, when it was a small and not very rich state, which, however,

could boast of a strong and well-trained army [7].

As long as Ukraine fights the Russian army on the battlefield and opposes Putin's Russia as a whole, the state will not be able to officially become a member of NATO. However, as soon as the victory becomes obvious, the Ukrainian state should join NATO as soon as possible, because it will allow Ukraine to spend less money on the army at the expense of the collective security mechanism. Undoubtedly, the West is ready to provide Ukraine with moral, economic, political and military assistance on a permanent basis, but the support from some external actors can hardly be considered equivalent to what the state would receive in the case of membership in the alliance. The membership in NATO will allow Ukraine to be presented to the world as a state in which investments can and should be made, because in the event of a new possible escalation no one will want to invest in the country [3]. No one will fight for Ukrainians without a reason, so no guarantees from the possible powerful states of the world will be able to replace the membership in NATO, where an attack on one country implies the automatic entry into war of the entire bloc.

It should also be noted that now the prospects of Ukraine's membership in NATO are the highest. At the current stage Ukraine's accession to NATO can only take place under the conditions of the so-called "special procedure", which Finland and Sweden have now become an example of. Dmytro Kuleba, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, emphasized that Ukraine in today's conditions does not need the so-called Membership Action Plan (MAP), which was presented to the state in Bucharest in 2008 as a sign that NATO's door is "always open" for Ukraine. He believed that "Finland and Sweden have shown that such programs are unnecessary and Ukraine is more than qualified to join" [11].

It is clear that the meaning of the MAP is for Ukraine to carry out a number of ambitious internal reforms under the pressure of NATO, but if the Ukrainian state receives the MAP

now, that will look extremely undesirable, taking into account the sacrifices Ukrainians can expect in the event of establishing armed neutrality and the impossibility of joining the security bloc. Therefore, it is extremely important for the Ukrainian leadership to abandon references to all documents and decisions that are based precisely on the idea that the MAP is mandatory for Ukraine to join NATO. In order for any mention of Bucharest 2008 and the MAP to disappear from the NATO discourse, Ukraine needs a completely new concept of interaction with this organization, which should be established by the summit in Vilnius in July 2023 [10]. Now it is the work, on which diplomats, politicians, experts and all those who sincerely aspire to see Ukraine in the Euro-Atlantic family, should be focused.

Conclusion. In conclusion, we can see that the policy of neutrality/non-alignment is no longer viable for guaranteeing Ukraine's security in the context of ongoing war with the Russian Federation. Undoubtedly, at that time when Ukraine gained its independence, this policy was the correct and only possible choice for the state. However, in the future, this policy made Ukraine extremely vulnerable to Russia's aggression. The concept of neutrality/non-alignment only weakens the political and economic stability of Ukraine and can no longer be considered correct and rational for the country in the long term perspective.

The only way for Ukraine to stay neutral/non-aligned is to receive the status of *armed neutrality*, which will no longer be a matter of personal choice of the Ukrainian nation, but rather a necessity arising from the impossibility of Ukraine to quickly join NATO due to the ongoing war with Russia. As soon as Putin's regime collapses, Ukraine will have to urgently apply to join NATO, and only then will the state be able to afford to reduce military spending and abandon armed neutrality as an official policy.

Although Ukraine's policy of neutrality/non-alignment may have seemed

like a good idea at the initial stage of Ukraine's existence, now we cannot ignore the negative consequences it had in the future for the security and stability of the state. Ukraine, relying on the mistakes of the past that cost it too much, must take all possible measures to guarantee its security and sovereignty, and this will require a proper review of the policy of neutrality/non-alignment to seek stronger alliances with the West.

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КОНЦЕПЦІЯ НЕЙТРАЛІТЕТУ/ ПОЗАБЛОКОВОСТІ В ПОЛІТИЦІ УКРАЇНИ

У статті аналізується значення та роль концепції нейтралітету/позаблоковості в політиці України в період її незалежності. З'ясовано, що впровадження політики нейтралітету/позаблоковості мало вкрай неоднозначні, навіть більше негативні наслідки для екзистенційного існування України до 2022 року, і що цей підхід вже не зможе гарантувати її повну безпеку в контексті триваючої війни з Російською Федерацією, яка значно послабила українську державу у політичному, економічному та військовому плані.

Ключові слова: *нейтралітет / позаблоковість, НАТО, повномасштабне вторгнення, російсько-українська війна, збройний нейтралітет.*

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