

УДК 327[(470+571):(477)]

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## FOREIGN POLICY ORIENTATIONS OF UKRAINE COMPARED WITH BELARUS AND RUSSIA

In this article we seek to advance the discussion of foreign policy orientations by focusing on their particular implications for Ukraine, that form part of the Slavic world and belong to many of its institutional structures but which at the same time are part of the European Union's new 'neighbourhood' and have made a formal commitment to a 'Euro-Atlantic' future. This article showed the evolution of foreign policy orientation of Ukraine compared with Belarus and Russia, first of all question of integration to the EU and NATO or vice-versa to CIS. At the beginning of XXI century the question of «Eastern» or «Western» choice was sharper then ever.

Key words: Ukraine, Belarus, Russian Federation, foreign policy.

The cold war defined two rival spheres of influence. No less important, it defined two sets of identities. Citizens of the communist countries to the east were part of a larger system of values, alliances and institutions. With the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, all these distinctions began to lose their earlier significance. Across the region, countries began to exercise their newly acquired sovereignty to form different patterns of association. Some of them joined the European Union. Others joined the Commonwealth of Independent States, established at the end of 1991, and some of them also became members of a series of multilateral associations that extended across the post-Soviet region. The closest association of all was the 'Community' and then far-reaching 'Union' between Russia and Belarus.

Issues of international reorientation were particularly acute for the 'lands in between', the Slavic states that had been part of the USSR but which were also geographically European, and which found themselves torn between their former Soviet associations and the invitation to take a fuller part in the economic and military alliance systems of the west. Perhaps the most fundamental of these reorientations was in relation to 'Europe'.

Foreign policy preferences among the Ukrainian mass public have been addressed in a number of recent studies, both in the west (Shulman 1998; Chudowsky and Kuzio 2003; Munro 2007; Mychajlyszyn 2008) and in Ukraine itself (Malyuk 2008; Reznik 2008) [8, p. 347].

Belarus, by contrast, is 'one of the least-studied European states to emerge from the breakup of the Soviet Union' (Ioffe 2007), and the literature is less abundant (Allison et al. 2005; White et al. 2005; Bekus 2008; Ioffe 2008;

Rudling 2008; and on relations with Russia, Suzdaltsev 2009) [8, p. 347]. Issues of identity and foreign policy in both countries acquired a new urgency following the various 'coloured revolutions' and renewed attempts by the Russian authorities to maintain their influence within the former Soviet republics by using various forms of soft power (Tsygankov 2006).

Samuel Huntington differentiated between the countries of the 'west' (which were marked out by their individualism, separation of church and state, rule of law and market economy) and a 'Slavic-Orthodox' civilisation in the east, also Christian, but one in which church and state were more closely related and foreign domination had lasted much longer. Differences of this kind, Huntington suggested, were the 'product of centuries', and 'far more fundamental than differences among political ideologies and political regimes'. Belarus and Ukraine were divided by this cleavage; Russia was a 'torn country', wholly Orthodox but divided between two continents, and whether it was really 'European' or 'Asiatic' had been debated since at least the time of Peter the Great's decision to locate his new capital on the Baltic [4, p. 29-31, 43-44].

According to Alexander Wendt, 'identities and interests are constituted by collective meanings that are always in process' [7, p. 407]. Moreover, identities themselves are 'embedded in a larger set of beliefs and policy preferences' — a phenomenon that Stephen Shulman calls a 'national identity complex' [5, p. 68]. In any state there may be several competing national identity complexes articulating different preferences for economic and political development, or patterns of international integration. Shulman cites contemporary Ukraine, where there are two main variants: an 'eastern Slavic' national identity complex and an 'ethnic Ukrainian' one [5, p. 60]. Differences in foreign policy preferences can be especially profound in multi-ethnic polities such as Ukraine or Belarus, where part of the population identify themselves as Russians while others identify themselves as ethnic Ukrainians or ethnic Belarusians, respectively. As Shulman argues, in a multi-ethnic state stronger ties with other states have a powerful effect on ethnic consciousness, and as a result 'foreign policy becomes a key element in the construction of national identity and an object of political contestation between groups with different visions of this identity' [6, p. 110]. Under certain circumstances, as in the case of Ukraine, a group within the society may have developed stronger ties with a foreign partner than another group in the same society may have developed with a different foreign partner, resulting in 'asymmetrical international integration' [6, p. 121]. Furthermore, national identity complexes may vary considerably not only in their content but also in their intensity.

As Viktor Chudowsky and Taras Kuzio have demonstrated, for instance, in contemporary Ukraine the eastern Slavic national identity — or Russian nationalism, as they call it — is weaker than the ethnic Ukrainian national identity complex, which is conterminous with Ukrainian nationalism [2, p. 281].

In this article we seek to advance the discussion of foreign policy orientations by focusing on their particular implications for Ukraine, that form part of the Slavic world and belong to many of its institutional structures but which at the same time are part of the European Union's new 'neighbourhood' and have made a formal commitment to a 'Euro-Atlantic' future.

In Ukraine public opinion is not normally a major determinant, as the Ukrainian

public is 'divided, passive, and not terribly concerned with foreign affairs' [2, p. 274]. At the same time there are occasions on which public sentiment can be decisive, as when the 'Orange revolution' led to a change of political leadership and a more overtly pro-western orientation in defence and foreign policy.

In Belarus it has often been difficult to see any linkage between domestic norms and the conduct of foreign policy when all the key decisions are in the hands of an authoritarian president, whether or not he enjoys the support of a popular consensus.

At the same time both Ukraine and Belarus found themselves caught in a 'clash of integration projects' [1] as the European Union moved to develop its own 'neighbourhood policy', and as both the EU and NATO contemplated a further extension of their membership towards the east. Developments of this kind were bound to alienate the Russian leadership, while western countries themselves were critical of the way in which the Russian authorities sought to exploit their energy resources and (in the short-lived conflict with Georgia) their overwhelming military superiority. All of this in turn was likely to have a powerful influence on 'European' and 'Slavic' orientations within the 'lands in between' themselves.

In 2010 more than 83 % defined themselves as Ukrainians, but 14 % as Russians; 40 % were Ukrainian Orthodox, but 25 % identified themselves as Russian Orthodox (many more were 'just Orthodox'). And in terms of native language the country was almost equally divided, with 50 % reporting Ukrainian as the language of their home environment and 47 % reporting Russian [8, p. 349].

In any case 'the reality in Ukraine is one of blending and mixing' [3, p. 106]. But there has been little dispute that the east of the country is more urbanised and educated as well as more Russian-speaking and Russian Orthodox than the west and, equally, that region itself 'makes a difference' even when social-structural variables of this kind have been taken into account (Barrington and Herron 2004; Shulman 2004; Katchnovski 2006) [3, p. 106].

Closer relations with former Soviet republics, however, have been balanced by a closer association with the European Union, and (more cautiously) with NATO. Relations with the EU are based on a Partnership and Co-operation Agreement, originally concluded in 1994, which is due to be replaced by an enhanced agreement in negotiations that began in 2007 but without any commitment to a 'membership perspective'. Ukraine is also a priority partner within the European Neighbourhood Policy, in connection with which a joint Action Plan was approved in February 2005. Relations with NATO are based on a Charter on a Distinctive Partnership, signed at NATO's Madrid Summit in July 1997, and on a NATO-Ukraine Commission, established at the same time as a means of developing the bilateral relationship. Ukraine was the first of the CIS member countries to join the Partnership for Peace, in 1994, and in May 2002 the Ukrainian authorities for the first time committed themselves to eventual membership. NATO for its own part has given no indication that it wishes to do more for the present than extend the forms of co-operation that already exist, although the 2008 Bucharest Summit agreed that membership was a legitimate long-term aspiration; and many of its member states are clearly reluctant to take any step that would prejudice their already difficult relationship with Russia.

East-west differences of this kind were directly reflected in the sequence of

presidential and parliamentary elections that took place from 2004 onwards. Viktor Yushchenko, the eventual winner of the second-round presidential election of December 2004, was openly associated with a strongly Euro- Atlantic orientation; his opponent, Viktor Yanukovich, placed improvement of relations with Ukraine's Slavic neighbours, including official status for the Russian language as well as Ukrainian.

The elections themselves showed that support was almost equally divided across the presidential camps and across the political parties, giving a somewhat provisional nature to the kind of 'choice' that appeared to have been made at each successive contest. As a result, it took some time after each election for a government to be formed that could command a parliamentary majority, and each of the administrations of the period was an uneasy coalition of disparate elements that could hardly take a lead on any of the international or domestic issues on which the country was divided. Another source of ambiguity was the constitutional changes that had taken place over the 'Orange' years — or that appear to have taken place, as the enhanced powers of the government in relation to the conduct of foreign policy had not been universally accepted and the constitutional court found its own position undermined in the attempt to resolve such disagreements (a presidential parliamentary system is inherently prone to such tensions). The rise of Yulia Tymoshenko and her supporters, the effects of the world financial crisis on the Ukrainian economy and the change in the presidency that took place when Yanukovich won a narrow victory at the following election in early 2010 introduced further elements of instability.

In every case European self-identity has been declining, rather than increasing, as the European Union extends its own boundaries towards the east: the greatest fall over the decade has been in, but the same trends are apparent in Belarus. About half our Russian and Belarusian respondents in 2000 thought they were at least to some extent 'European'. By the later years of the decade the proportions were lower in every case [8, p. 353].

In Belarus and Russia those who claimed they 'never' felt European were about half of all our respondents in 2007 and 2008, and almost a third in Belarus in 2009. Respondents felt their first identity was as a citizen of that country. Almost to the same extent, they felt they were citizens of their local area or settlement; regional identities were also important. But relatively few thought of their identity as European, in the first or even the second place. Belarusians, who had been somewhat more likely to think of themselves as 'Europeans', were also the most likely to associate themselves with a primary or secondary European identity. But even in Belarus a European identity came a long way behind an identity that was related to the state itself or the town or region in which they lived [8, p. 354].

In Russia a European identity was still less common, even in the parts of the country that are geographically European, and rather fewer conceived of themselves in this way than as Soviet citizens nearly two decades after the demise of the USSR itself. European identity in Belarus and Russia had never been greater than 20 %, and national identity had never been less than 68 % [8, p. 355].

Support for EU membership is closely related to 'Europeanness': those who thought of themselves as 'to a significant extent European' were more than three times as likely to be strongly in favour of EU membership as others, for example, Ukrainians in 2007.

They were more likely to be able to identify the EU correctly, given a list of real and imaginary international organisations, and to locate its headquarters. Most strikingly of all, they were four or five times as likely as others to take a positive view of the EU and of its aims and activities; and those who took a positive view of the EU's aims and activities were in turn four or five times more likely to support the principle of membership.

Support for NATO membership was closely associated with other views of the alliance. Supporters of NATO membership were able to identify it more readily when they were given a list of real or imaginary international organisations, and they were more likely to see the alliance as a means of strengthening international security, although there were also a few who saw it as a 'base for western expansion' but all the same wished to join.

So, we can conclude that there is differentiation between foreign policy orientations of Ukrainians and Belarusians and Russians during post-Soviet period. Slavic or western choices have been associated with distinct cultural communities in Ukraine but not in the other two countries.

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*Стаття надійшла до редакції 31.08.2015*

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### **ЗОВНІШНЬОПОЛІТИЧНІ ОРІЄНТАЦІЇ УКРАЇНИ ПОРІВНЯНО З БІЛОРУССЮ ТА РОСІЄЮ**

#### **Резюме**

В статті дискутуються зовнішньополітичні орієнтації на прикладі України, яка є часткою слов'янського світу й належить до багатьох його інституційних структур, але яка в той же час є часткою «сусідства» ЄС й зробила вибір щодо євроатлантичного майбутнього. Стаття показала еволюцію зовнішньополітичних орієнтацій України порівняно з Білоруссю та Росією, насамперед щодо питання інтеграції в ЄС та НАТО, чи навпаки до СНД. На початку ХХІ ст. питання «східного» чи «західного» вибору загострилися як ніколи.

**Ключові слова:** Україна, Білорусь, Російська Федерація, зовнішня політика.

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### **ВНЕШНЕПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ ОРИЕНТАЦИИ УКРАИНЫ СРАВНИТЕЛЬНО С БЕЛОРУССЬЮ И РОССИЕЙ**

#### **Резюме**

В статье дискутируются внешнеполитические ориентации на примере Украины, которая является частью славянского мира и принадлежит к многим его институциональным структурам, но которая в то же время является частью «соседства» ЕС и сделала выбор относительно евроатлантичного будущего. Статья показала эволюцию внешнеполитических ориентаций Украины сравнительно с Белоруссией и Россией, прежде всего по вопросу интеграции в ЕС и НАТО, или напротив в СНГ. В начале ХХІ в. вопрос «восточного» или «западного» выбора обострился как никогда.

**Ключевые слова:** Украина, Белоруссия, Российская Федерация, внешняя политика.