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## Między zachodem a wschodem; wobec problemu orientacji polityki zagranicznej Ukrainy

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## **MIĘDZY ZACHODEM A WSCHODEM; WOBEC PROBLEMU ORIENTACJI POLITYKI ZAGRANICZNEJ UKRAINY**

**Streszczenie:** Położenie geopolityczne Ukrainy zawsze wyznaczało osobliwości jej kierunków zewnętrznych, potencjalnych sojuszników, jak również kształtowało problem wyboru strategii integracyjnych w sferach politycznej, gospodarczej, socjalnej oraz kulturalnej. Proklamując niepodległość 24 sierpnia 1991 roku Ukraina potwierdziła dążenie ku integracji europejskiej oraz euroatlantyckiej, ogłaszając swoją przynależność do europejskiej przestrzeni cywilizacyjnej oraz wartości europejskich. Równoległe jednym z głównych partnerów Ukrainy pozostaje Federacja Rosyjska, z którą stosunki na poszczególnych płaszczyznach mają wielowiekowe tradycje. Kwestia wyboru pomiędzy Zachodem a Wschodem dotyczy głównych zjednoczeń integracyjnych – Unii Europejskiej, Umowy o współpracy, oraz Unii Celnej – jako ważnego ogniwa procesów integracyjnych na przestrzeni postradzieckiej w ramach Sojuszu Euroazjatyckiego. Czy uda się i czy jest docelowym stosowanie „polityki balansu” między dwiema siłami i jaki jest dzisiejszy stan stosunków UE–Ukraina–Rosja – to główne kwestie rozpatrywane przez autorów artykułu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Ukraina, Rosja, Unia Europejska, polityka zagraniczna

### **INTRODUCTION**

The geopolitical position of Ukraine has always determined peculiarities of its foreign policy vectors and the potential allies and posed a choice of integration strategies in political, economic, social and cultural areas. Looking back to the historical roots, the main two vectors – East and West – are arising which still Ukrainian leading political establishment faces.

After Ukraine proclaimed its independence on August 24, 1991, Ukrainian official political line was turned to the West, adherent to European and Euro-Atlantic

integration, distinguished it among the key national interests [Доробів <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua>]. Admittedly, the Atlantic component of the integration was excluded from the Ukrainian foreign policy priorities, but the European one is still being kept and assigned in the main Ukrainian national law providing foundations for domestic and foreign policy of Ukraine (see: The Law of Ukraine „On the Basis of Domestic and Foreign Policy”, 01.07.2010 № 2411-VI) [Закон <http://zakon4.rada.gov.ua>].

The main demand of the foreign policy is the complete and comprehensive, effective provision of the national interests of Ukraine. At the current moment the alternative between two vectors – western and eastern – is still arising and most probably stronger than ever before. The most-discussed choice faced by Ukraine can be expressed as the following: the European Union and the Eurasian Union.

And if the European Union is an initiative with long democratic western traditions and well-defined values, the Eurasian Union is a „soon to be created” project that has been launched with the first step of integration within the post-soviet area – the Customs Union and experiences a vast majority of problems (such as the proposed referendum in Kazakhstan on expediency of the further membership in the Customs Union).

At the current year 2013 the problem of choice mentioned above is the most urgent and significant issue of the political, economic, cultural, social, ideological nature that should be addressed by Ukrainian politicians

## UKRAINE - EAST

The significance of the bilateral relations between Ukraine and its so-called „elder brother” Russia at different levels can’t be underestimated. The tight connections between two countries and two nations go back to the past and have deep historical roots. The development of the relations with the northern-eastern neighbour – Russian Federation – has always been one of the key priorities in the foreign policy of Ukraine. Moreover, nowadays restructuring this component is one of the most complicated and urgent, taking different aspects into account.

First of all, in terms of resumption of official Moscow’s strategic power the dimension of relations between Ukraine and Russia is of great interest for all European community, i.e. the leading Western European countries (and also the USA – e.g. the statement

made by Hillary Clinton at the 10th meeting of Yalta European Strategy [Former US Secretary <http://yes-ukraine.org>] and the nearest neighbours of Ukraine in the region of Central and Eastern Europe.

Russian political leader Vladimir Putin in his numerous declarations seems to be adherent to Russian classical foreign policy of the 19th century – to some experts' opinion in the field of political science such turn in Russian foreign policy at the beginning of the 21st century can be estimated as a new edition of the old Realpolitik strategy that is likely to be adapted to conditions of the modern global world [Фісанов 2012, 38].

Among others, one of the main geopolitical and economic strategies of Moscow at the regional level is the creation of the multilevel integration structure – the Eurasian Union. The plot of the Eurasian Union (declared in 1995 where the origins of the Eurasian Union go back to) is supposed to be the economy first of all that is widely used to persuade Ukrainian government in the perspectives of this integration necessity and advantages for Ukraine. But the political aspect of this initiative also should be considered.

The first level of integration in the post-soviet region – the Customs Union – was officially initiated by Kazakhstan and established in January 1, 2010. Currently the Customs Union includes Russian Federation, Belarus and Kazakhstan and is widely and actively inspired to enlargement by official Moscow.

The warm welcome to the Customs Union was addressed to Ukraine, transforming into the perspective to become an equal partner in the Eurasian Union after 2015. Since August of the current year this warm welcoming changed mostly by threats and challenges. Sergey Glazyev, advisor to the president of the Russian Federation, stated that the AA signing will lead to the significant and long-term worsening of the relations between Kyiv and Moscow [Советник <http://zn.ua/POLITICS>].

Moscow has already demonstrated its pragmatic character to official Kyiv that has been told clearly how much it would lose if it signs the Association Agreement. After thorough explanations, Moscow decided to show some possible losses for Kyiv in the form of trade sanctions against Ukraine in August of the current year. By blocking import from Ukraine, Russia was waging a trade war that was a pressure, demonstrating possible consequences of Vilnius summit for Ukraine.

Viktor Yanukovich, the President of Ukraine, first stated some Ukraine's interest in joining the Customs Union in November 2010 at the joint press-conference with Dmitriy Medvedev [Ukraine may join <http://english.ruvr.ru>]. Later in March 2012 such assumption was repeated again. Yet, Viktor Yanukovich noticed that it might be done only in the future as presently it could be treated as the contradiction to the Constitution of Ukraine

[Yanukovych <http://www.kyivpost.com>]. Meanwhile, official Moscow was demonstrating its thorough interest in Ukraine in the proposed integration project.

The main accent is made upon the economic component of the integration. According to the leader of the Communist party of Russian Federation Hennadiy Ziuganov, the integration of the economic potential of both states [Ukraine and Russia. – Authors] can lead the countries out the 20-years economic stagnation [Mykhaylenko <http://2000.net.ua>].

The ambassador of Russian Federation in Ukraine Mihail Zurabov said that Russia does not produce any pressure as Ukraine is absolutely free while choosing its partners – both political and economic, concerning its further development including joining the integration structures [Ivzhenko <http://www.ng.ru>]. But to some extent it' is obvious that Russian policy is defined considering the foreign policy direction chosen by official Kyiv.

Even if to consider that currently the Customs Union is focusing on economic issues, the Eurasian Union cannot avoid the political element. The President of Russian Federation Vladimir Putin agrees that the complicated choice facing Ukraine is, first of all, a political one [Putin <http://www.pravda.com.ua>].

Moreover, the political character of the choice is expressed not only by the representatives of the political establishment, but also by leading public figures, activists of NGOs dealing with public diplomacy, etc. The economic and financial players are also significantly aware of Ukraine's vector of integration. Russia has been trying to use fuel prices as a kind of lure to involve Ukraine into the customs union with Belarus and Kazakhstan notwithstanding Ukraine's will to deepen economic and political ties with the EU (note: Ukraine depends significantly of its natural-gas supply on Russia; in 2009 gas supply was shut off for two weeks to Ukrainians – so-called „gas-wars” with Russia).

There are no doubts that Russia has always been a strategic partner of Ukraine and it still is. But so often remembered „empire heritage” of Russia can-not provide a space for a new nature of relations between official Kyiv and Mos-cow. If to consider the Eurasian Union to be an attempt to unite the post-soviet countries with the former heritage, even if only the economic one, it obviously will not meet thorough support in many regions of Ukraine as being treated a step back (here, worth mentioning, e.g., the official position of the leader of Ukrainian opposition Arseniy Yatseniuk).

Membership in the Customs Union will mean a loss of the significant part of Ukraine's economic sovereignty (if only economic), that is perceived as the main considerable threat by the vast majority of Ukrainians. Taking this into account, it' is necessary to

search for new mechanisms for mutual cooperation. „We do think we can reach an agreement that will allow us to work with the Customs Union to the extent which Ukrainian laws and our obligations to world organizations such as the World Trade Organization allow”, – said the Ukrainian President [President tells Bloomberg <http://en.for-ua.com>].

Viktor Yanukovich explained the necessity of „partial integration” with the Customs Union and joining to its some clauses with the economic needs „not to lose a lot that is unacceptable today for the economy of Ukraine” [Ivzhenko <http://www.ng.ru>].

In January 2013 Viktor Yanukovich’s official visit to Moscow, where the integration perspectives were to be discussed, was unexpectedly cancelled. Different numerous opinions were expressed concerning the reasons of two presidents’ meeting cancellation. Viktor Yanukovich stated that Ukraine was trying to meet the legal requirements of the Customs Union without harming other international accords and that „experts from both sides [Ukraine and Russia] are currently working on this issue” [Ukraine leader <http://www.bbc.co.uk>].

At the same time he also expressed his hope that the AA with the EU would be signed in autumn 2013. Europe has reacted to the above – in February 25, 2013 President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso made the EU point of view pretty clear: „One country cannot at the same time be a member of a customs union and be in a deep common free-trade area with the European Union” [Barroso <http://www.ukrainebusiness.com.ua>].

As many Ukrainian scholars argue while researching Ukrainian – Russian strategic partnership, its concept can be based on the following: international legal principles of respect for Ukrainian state; democratic principles of respect for human rights; general human rights (European) [Чекаленко, Шмельов, Попова 2011, 16-19]. Focusing on the notion of the strategic partnership, it is necessary to stress that such relations can be considered as peculiar obligations to the partner and defined with a certain number of special interests and conditions.

First of all, they should be characterized with the respect for the sovereignty of the partner, that means the absence of territorial claims, the convergence of interests and values, recognition of the appropriateness of the bilateral trade dynamic growth, etc.

## UKRAINE - WEST

Even if the EU membership was not proposed to official Kyiv where politicians indeed realized that Ukraine was not and still is not ready to meet all the requirements to join the EU, there was a strong will and expectation for further and deeper cooperation between Ukraine and the EU. Namely, we consider the Association Agreement (AA) as a potential significant step forward to such cooperation both in the political and economic field. The ideological component also plays a significant role in this process.

Can the events of 2013 in Ukraine and around Ukraine be evaluated as the geopolitical struggle for Ukraine to prevent its integration with another Union? Or was it just the time for two main offers to the country in the centre of Europe with about 45 million population and long centuries of history made both from the West and from the East?

Ukraine's potential to meet the EU Association Agreement requirements has been considered by the European Union as being incompatible with Ukraine's joining the customs union with Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus almost from the very beginning.

The integration within the customs union of the further Eurasian Union would end the chances for the Association Agreement with the EU according to European Commission President José Manuel Barroso as we stated above. As for the cancellation of Viktor Yanukovich's visit to Moscow at the beginning of 2013 to negotiate with the Russian President Vladimir Putin, the director of the Political Research and Conflict Studies Centre Mykhaylo Pohrebyns'kyi noticed that between the official confirmation of the Presidents' visit to Moscow and its revocation there was a telephone call made by José Manuel Barroso to Ukrainian President.

„It's difficult for me to say whether this conversation could influence the assessment of the document (concerning joining the Customs Union) by the Ukrainian side, but I don't exclude it", – said Pohrebyns'kyi [Ivzhenko <http://www.ng.ru>].

Whereas signing the AA for Ukraine could become a symbolic insurance against coming back to Russia's sphere of influence, as many experts consider. Also the agreement could be an instrument for Ukraine's modernization and deep economic integration into the single market of the EU. But it directly depends on Ukraine and its readiness to modernize its economy and approaches to the issue in general.

The significance of the Association Agreement is also defined with the fact that it would not be just an agreement concerning the liberalization in trade of goods

– it was going to be a „deep and comprehensive” agreement providing also the liberalization of services trade and capital movements and to a certain extent – the labour movement [Eliseev <http://www.pravda.com.ua>].

It could also provide a major adaptation to the European regulatory legislation in Ukraine in the areas of transport, energy, services, agriculture, etc. And what is of the most significance, the agreement between the EU and Ukraine could be the one, based on the recognition of the European identity of Ukraine. The Association definitely did not mean the EU membership.

But for Ukraine the European integration primarily means standards of life improving, modernization in spheres of government and society, improving the competitiveness of Ukrainian producers, etc. The agreement would allow Ukraine to reach a level of development where the further movement towards the EU becomes the issue of the political expediency.

Meanwhile, the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Leonid Kozhara believed that „Ukraine is not a mere beneficiary of the Agreement. It may contribute considerably to the development of a strong, modern, Europe”. It could open opportunities not only for both parties of the Agreement, but for the international community in general. „Ukraine, along with the other countries of the Eastern Partnership may become a connecting link in the creation of a free trade area that reaches from Lisbon to Vladivostok”, noted the Minister [Ukraine may become <http://yes-ukraine.org>].

The fundamental decision for the perspectives of Ukrainian foreign policy was made at the EU – Ukraine summit in Brussels in February 25, 2013 and Ukraine was to make progress and to prove its willingness to commit to the EU economic space till the deadline that was defined as May 1 for reforms implementation due to the following: selective justice (first of all Tymoshenko’s case), democratic shortcomings and judicial reforms.

The degree of tension in the relations between Kyiv and Brussels had weakened – all Ukrainian mass media as well as many politicians declared that the country was preparing to association. „Two laws from ten have already been passed, two of which in the first reading. I hope when the parliament comes back from their May holidays, till the end of the month all other laws will also be adopted.

I’m sure that the 71 clauses will be accomplished”, – the Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine A. Kliuiev assured after his official visit to Brussels in April 23-24 [Ukraine is implementing <http://www.unian.net>].

The European Commissioner Štefan Füle also gave his assessment to this meeting that was an opportunity to take stock of the actions taken by Ukraine to follow up on the commitments discussed at the European Union-Ukraine Summit on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February.

„The set of documents adopted by Ukraine to ensure the follow up of the EU’s policy of engagement reflect its determination to achieve the objective of signing the Association Agreement and its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area by the time of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius”, Commissioner Füle said, added that „our on-going screening of Ukraine’s envisaged actions shows that some outstanding issues require additional attention” [Statement by Commissioner <http://europa.eu>].

The perspectives became more realistic and clearer. But unfortunately the lack of Ukrainian politicians’ real statehood approach towards the issue is a characteristic feature of foreign policy of Ukraine that prevents from the proper using of strategic position of Ukraine between East and West.

It can be proved by the decision of Ukrainian authority establishment, made on the eve of summit in Vilnius. There are no doubts that the task is very complicated and requires significant efforts. But Ukraine has to find a way out if is guided, first of all, with its own national interests, correspondingly emphasizing the proper components of the strategic partnership.

## CONCLUSION

Comparison of the current relations between Ukraine and West (the European Union) and Ukraine – East (Russian Federation), at least, theoretically, demonstrates that the first are oriented towards future perspective and the second are focused on solving the current problems [Шапалова 2011, 26].

The problem of choosing the dominant vector of Ukrainian foreign policy between several proposed has different origins. As for the recent years of Ukrainian foreign policy, instead of conducting stable approaches towards either the West or the East, Ukrainian politicians have chosen to take good advantages of cooperation and further integration with both partners.

In December 2012 Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov stated that Ukraine could and should cooperate with both the Customs Union and the European

Union at the same time. If there is any possibility to choose both variants of integration towards West and East, the Ukrainian Prime-Minister commented pretty clearly: „It’s necessary to have a political will of Russia”.

And political will of Russia is quite understandable and evident, especially as it has shown up for several recent months. Russia is trying to keep Ukraine under its impact with all possible methods, using even those which in any way cannot be called friendly and inherent to the allied neighbouring country.

Reform in Ukraine in accordance with the AA provisions could meet the interests of all parties, including Russia, as it would provide the basis for growing confidence in Ukraine as an international partner loyal to the rule of law and predictability, a vital joining element of trade and economic bridge between Brussels and Moscow and later a unique platform for the development of mutually beneficial relations between the EU and the members of integration projects in the post-soviet area.

For Ukraine the choice between East and West has much more importance than just the economic perspectives. Ukraine could be a „shared neighbourhood” for Russia and Europe, facing two proposed initiatives which are to some extent provoked with the willingness to prevent a loss of influence on the country by both sides. Expansion of the Eurasian initiative to Ukraine would strengthen the union both politically and economically. Russia is obviously trying to take back its positions of the primary actor at the international arena lost with the Soviet Union’s collapse.

Russia considers post-soviet area to be a sphere for its national interests and does not actually agree with the status-quo changes. For the EU obviously the Association agreement with Ukraine has more political meaning than economic one. The initiative of Moscow has become a challenge to the EU as it demonstrated that the EU is no longer the only power of the effective governance in the region and this challenge is to be settled without a loss of the impact.

Ukraine is obviously a significant object for competition where the integration priorities towards West or East present the main foreign political agenda at the current period. But all debates taken place around Ukraine are taking place because of the element of its fault as well.

The following truth is undeniable: none of the countries can expect the proper place within the world community if its society is not united around the national statehood idea, if the state does not have the corresponding internal policy that would meet the society needs, at least, its majority.

In other words, the state foreign policy is to be formed on the basis of the proper development of internal one, namely sound principles of society functioning.

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**BETWEEN WEST AND EAST: TOWARDS THE PROBLEM OF FOREIGN POLICY ORIENTATION OF UKRAINE**

**Abstrakt.** The geopolitical position of Ukraine has always determined the peculiarities of its foreign policy vectors, potential allies, as well as it shaped the problem of choosing the integration strategies in political, economic, social and cultural spheres. By proclaiming its independence on 24th August 1991, Ukraine confirmed the aspiration towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration, declaring its membership to European civilisation and cultural values sphere. At the same time, Russian Federation remains one of the main Ukrainian partners due to many centuries of relations. The issue of choice between East and West concerns the main integrations – European Union, Cooperation Agreement and the Customs Union – as an important link of integration processes in the post-soviet space within the Eurasian Alliance. Whether it will be possible or whether it is ultimate to use the policy of balance between two forces and what today's state of relations among UE-Ukraine-Russia is- these are the main issues of this article.

**Key words:** Ukraine, Russia, European Union, foreign policy

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