



Asociace
pro mezinárodní
otázky
Association
for International
Affairs

Briefing Paper 3/2011

Ukraine's European Choice and Characteristics of Ukrainian Society

—

May 2011

Ukraine's European Choice and Characteristics of Ukrainian Society

—

Julia Ostanina *May 2011*



Ukraine's European Choice and Characteristics of Ukrainian Society

Among all CIS countries involved in the EU's framework of European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership, Ukraine is the most progressive on its way towards more robust and comprehensive cooperation with the European Union.¹ Ukraine considers integration into the EU its primary foreign policy objective. At the same time, it is obvious that Ukraine's membership in the EU is hardly possible in the near future. Since 2007, as part of the planned Association Agreement, Ukraine and the EU have been negotiating a creation of a deep and comprehensive free trade area. While acknowledging future benefits from the access to the European market and the enhancement of further European investment, Ukraine's political elite emphasizes losses for the country's economy accompanying the adoption of EU standards and regulations. Apparently, further integration process will bring high social costs for Ukraine, and success will thus depend on whether Ukrainian society finds itself ready and willing to accept them. Things are further complicated by the influence exerted by another actor involved in Ukrainian affairs: using its own levers, Russia tries to force through its integration project in the form of a Customs Union or a Union State.

This paper focuses on Ukrainian society's perception of Ukraine's role and position between the two centres of gravity - the European Union and Russia - and the direction of Ukraine's development in the future. Attention is paid to personal priorities of Ukrainian people, their understanding and attitude towards its Western and Eastern neighbours. Further, the paper tackles the question to what extent the EU and Russia have an impact on Ukraine's public opinion regarding the preferences each other's another integration alternatives.

As the poll conducted by IFAK Ukraine demonstrates², in December 2010 35% of Ukrainians expected their country to have good relations with both the European Union and Russia. This ambivalent perspective of the Ukrainian society is reasonable. Europe is viewed as a financial magnet, a model of stable long-term development and a source of support for economic and political modernization which are Ukraine's most essential and urgent tasks. 50% of Ukrainians expect their country to join the European Union in the next ten years.³

¹ Eastern Partnership Community: Partner states: Ukraine. Available at: <http://www.easternpartnership.org/partner-states/ukraine> (latest review 25.03.2011)

² DW-Trend/IFAK Ukraine 12/2010, Available at: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,14767626,00.html> (latest review 01.04.2011)

³ DW-Trend/IFAK Ukraine 12/2010, Available at: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,14767626,00.html> (latest review 01.04.2011)



Briefing Paper 3/2011

Ukraine's European Choice and Characteristics of Ukrainian Society

–
May 2011

However, only a minority of Ukrainians tend to describe the relations with Europe as based on partnership (36%) or neutral (39%).⁴

Ukraine and Russia, on the other hand, have historically strong links to each other, and the economies of the two countries are closely interconnected. Also the societies have close mental, ethnic and cultural ties. The survey carried out by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) shows that an absolute majority of Ukraine's citizens (93%) have a positive attitude towards Russia.⁵ Among countries with which Ukraine has friendly relations, Russia occupies the first place with 40% of support⁶, and 29% of Ukrainians are in favour of forming a Union with Russia.⁷

The ambivalent understanding of Ukraine's position - close relations with both the EU and Russia - is not perceived as contradictory in the mindset of Ukrainians. However, when it comes to political reality, European aspirations and the goal of retaining friendly and close relations with Russia become mutually exclusive and hardly tenable. The events in the aftermath of the "Orange Revolution" deliver a proof of this. As soon as the words of Ukrainian politicians about European integration evolve into deeds, a strongly negative reaction from Russia follows, regarding the European choice as unsuitable for Ukraine and essentially anti-Russian. As Ukraine's humanitarian sphere is dominated by the deeply ideological humanitarian product⁸ of the Russian Federation⁹, every such information campaign has a strong impact on the Ukrainian public opinion. A substantial part of Ukraine's radio and television stations, as well as large newspapers are owned by Ukraine's heavy industry oligarchs mainly from the eastern part of the country (moreover, 20% of the Ukrainian newspaper market is covered by the imported from Russia newspapers).¹⁰

⁴ DW-Trend/IFAK Ukraine 12/2010, Available at: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,14767626,00.html> (latest review 01.04.2011)

⁵ Kiev International Institute of Sociology (KIIS). Dynamics of relations of Ukraine's and Russia's populations to each other. Available at: <http://kiis.com.ua/ua/news/view-53.html> (latest review 29.03.2011)

⁶ DW-Trend/IFAK Ukraine 12/2010, Available at: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,14767626,00.html> (latest review 01.04.2011)

⁷ DW-Trend/IFAK Ukraine 12/2010, Available at: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,14767626,00.html> (latest review 01.04.2011)

⁸ The term „humanitarian sphere“ includes cultural, information and educational areas of social life of a country. Consequently, a „humanitarian product“ is understood as a product of the cultural, information and educational spheres.

⁹ Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation. "Perceptions of Russia in Ukraine, Romania and Moldova". Kyiv 2011. p.4. Available at: <http://www.irf.ua/files/ukr/programs/euro/perceptionruinuamdro.pdf> (latest review 01.04.2011)

¹⁰ Besters-Dilger, J. "Language Policy in the Mass Media", p. 253 in: Besters-Dilger, J.(ed.) "Language Policy and Language situation in Ukraine: Analysis and Recommendations", Frankfurt am Main 2009.



Briefing Paper 3/2011

Ukraine's European Choice and Characteristics of Ukrainian Society

–
May 2011

Economic and political interests of these oligarchic groups and their energy-intensive industries depend to an overwhelming extent on the import of Russian raw materials.

The presence of the EU in Ukraine's media space - in contrast to economic and political influence - is negligible¹¹ which makes it difficult to promote and to get people attached to European values. Polls show that among the main goals of the EU, Ukrainians see democracy and the freedom of speech only in the 3rd place (32%), with personal importance of them at only 24%, whereas economic growth and the common European security system are evaluated by Ukraine's population as much more important for both the EU (55% and 40% respectively) and them personally (48% and 39% respectively).¹² The results of elections in 2010 can be seen as an illustration of this: willing to navigate Ukraine towards the West but failing to live up to people's expectations concerning economic prosperity, president Victor Yushchenko was voted out of office.

Another factor that explains why the Ukrainian society is responsive towards the Russian information policy is the country's cultural and national composition. 17% of Ukraine's citizens are ethnic Russians¹³, almost 21% have double ethnic self-identification¹⁴ and another 33% are Russian-speaking Ukrainians.¹⁵ All these groups, which compose 62% of Ukraine's population, are linked to Russia in one or another way. Their perception of Russia as a political factor differs from that of mono-ethnic, Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians¹⁶ and makes them less critical and resistant to information products coming from Russia. According to the usage of languages and "civilization preferences", Ukraine is divided into predominantly Ukrainian-speaking and Ukraine-attached West and a predominantly Russian-speaking and Russia-attached South and East. The division of the country is neatly reflected in different attitudes towards the EU membership. Whereas in 2008, western Ukraine

¹¹ Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation. "Perceptions of Russia in Ukraine, Romania and Moldova". Kyiv 2011. p.4. Available at: <http://www.irf.ua/files/ukr/programs/euro/perceptionruinuamdro.pdf> (latest review 01.04.2011)

¹² DW-Trend/IFAK Ukraine 12/2010, Available at: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,14767626,00.html> (latest review 01.04.2011)

¹³ State Statistics Committee of Ukraine. National Structure of Ukraine's population. All-Ukrainian population census' 2001 data. Available at <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/nationality/> (latest review 28.03.2011)

¹⁴ Khmelko V. Political Orientation and the Social Structure of two parts of Ukraine. 2009., p.22. Available at: http://www.nbu.gov.ua/portal/natural/vkhnu/Soc_dos/2009_881/Khmelko.pdf (latest review 28.03.2011)

¹⁵ Khmelko V. Political Orientation and the Social Structure of two parts of Ukraine. 2009., p.22. Available at: http://www.nbu.gov.ua/portal/natural/vkhnu/Soc_dos/2009_881/Khmelko.pdf (latest review 28.03.2011)

¹⁶ Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation. "Perceptions of Russia in Ukraine, Romania and Moldova". Kyiv 2011. p.66. Available at: <http://www.irf.ua/files/ukr/programs/euro/perceptionruinuamdro.pdf> (latest review 01.04.2011)



Briefing Paper 3/2011

Ukraine's European Choice and Characteristics of Ukrainian Society

–
May 2011

accommodated 54% of supporters and 21% of opponents to joining the EU, in the eastern part 30% were for and 46% against.¹⁷

Aforementioned differences along the geographical lines are a very sensitive issue for Ukraine. As events in Crimea in 1994 demonstrated, they can take the form of a dangerous threat to Ukraine's territorial integrity. The "two Ukraines" reality determines to a large extent both internal and external politics of the country which inevitably ends up investing a lot of energy in keeping the fragile balance between its European and Russian political vectors.

The policy of ultimatums forged by the Russian Federation sharpens the discrepancies in the Ukrainian society. Russia is also able to multiply its effect by using economic levers, making political relations between the two countries tangible for each and every Ukrainian. On the one hand, it may introduce measures painful for Ukraine's economy in such sensitive areas as gas deliveries, where Ukraine faces near total dependency on Russia without any diversification prospects for the near future. On the other hand, Russia tries to make visible economic benefits of loyalty. Its offers reach from a 30% price reduction of Russian gas (though, in response to the prorogated lease agreement in Sevastopol), through a merger of the gas monopolies Naftogas and Gazprom, to large-scale economic cooperation in the form of a Customs Union or even a Union State.

As demonstrated, the Ukrainian society's perception of the country's place in Europe attempts to reconcile the European and Russian directions which, however, tend to become antagonistic due to Russia's strong influence on Ukraine's public opinion. Russian ideologically charged humanitarian product contributes to the division of the country, bringing it into a situation of political stalemate where every major in either the Western or the Eastern direction is regarded as unacceptable by a part of the society. Compared to Russia's dominant position, the European Union is heavily underrepresented in Ukraine's humanitarian sphere. Its insignificant role makes it difficult to promote and make Ukrainians share European values and ideals. As a result, no sufficient consolidation around the European values in the Ukrainian society can be observed to give full support to massive changes needed for the European integration process and to bear the costs of it.

Sources

- Besters-Dilger, J. "Language Policy in the Mass Media", p. 253 in: Besters-Dilger, J. (ed.) "Language Policy and Language situation in Ukraine: Analysis and Recommendations", Frankfurt am Main 2009;
- Khmelko V. Political Orientation and the Social Structure of two parts of Ukraine. 2009. Available at:

¹⁷ Khmelko V. Political Orientation and the Social Structure of two parts of Ukraine. 2009., p.22. Available at: http://www.nbu.gov.ua/portal/natural/vkhnu/Soc_dos/2009_881/Khmelko.pdf (latest review 28.03.2011)



Asociace
pro mezinárodní
otázký
Association
for International
Affairs

Briefing Paper 3/2011

Ukraine's European Choice and Characteristics of Ukrainian Society

–
May 2011

http://www.nbu.gov.ua/portal/natural/vkhnu/Soc_dos/2009_881/Khmelko.pdf
(latest review 28.03.2011);

- DW-Trend/IFAK Ukraine: 12/2010, Available at: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,14767626,00.html> (latest review 01.04.2011);
- Eastern Partnership Community: Partner states: Ukraine. Available at: <http://www.easternpartnership.org/partner-states/ukraine> (latest review 25.03.2011);
- Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation. "Perceptions of Russia in Ukraine, Romania and Moldova". Kyiv 2011., p.4. Available at: <http://www.irf.ua/files/ukr/programs/euro/perceptionruinuamdro.pdf> (latest review 01.04.2011);
- Kiev International Institute of Sociology (KIIS). Dynamics of relations of Ukraine's and Russia's populations to each other. Available at: <http://kiis.com.ua/ua/news/view-53.html> (latest review 29.03.2011);
- State Statistics Committee of Ukraine. National Structure of Ukraine's population. All-Ukrainian population census' 2001 data. Available at <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/nationality/> (latest review 28.03.2011).