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## UKRAINE AND POLAND: FACING THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CHALLENGES

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**Abstract.** Establishing a common strategic framework is a decisive factor in the Ukrainian-Polish relations in the current social and political context. The complexity of the partnership between the two states arise from their geographical location on the borderline between civilizations, the site of historical cataclysms. At the same time, national sovereignty of was always a high priority for both peoples. The recognition of Ukraine's independence by Poland marked a new stage of rapprochement between Warsaw and Kyiv, the act being evidence of maturity of the Polish political elite. Poland made its best to promote the interest of Ukraine in the international political arena. The article suggests periodization in the history of the Ukrainian-Polish partnership.

Ukrainian policy can be modelled on Poland's experience of the transformation of society.

Being a member of the European Union, Poland advocates the idea of European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine. Increased economic cooperation is one of the aspects of the Ukrainian-Polish partnership. Cooperation at regional level, between local government bodies is also important for the relations between the two states. Step by step, visa regulations are being liberalized, interpersonal contacts broadened. The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnesses a change in political consciousness of Ukrainian and Polish people, who reconsider painful events from their past.

**Keywords:** Ukraine, Poland, historiography, Ukrainian-Polish relationship, relations between the states, political elites, European integration, visa regulations, regional security.

What are the prospects for the Ukrainian-Polish relationship? Will its quality get enhanced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to the benefit of the general European security system, or will it come to a dead end? To what extent can the stereotypes of the past affect the relationship between the two states and their peoples? Now the Ukrainian, Polish, and European political elites face these challenging questions; and geopolitical development of Europe in the next decades depends on the answers.

It is self-evident that the success of the Ukrainian-Polish partnership is determined by the effectiveness of the countries' cooperation in all spheres of political, economic, and spiritual life. Building up relationship between our two states might seem a comparatively easy task as we can learn from the extensive experience of Germany and France and, after all, from that of Poland and Germany. Sceptics argue, though, that it is a rather superficial approach and such historical parallels are problematic since each country has its own national interests, which may be quite different from the interests of another state. This argument can be rejected on the grounds that partnership, despite some natural differences in views of political elites, is built around a common strategic framework established by both partners in a given historical context for the greater good of their nations.

Still in the case of Ukraine and Poland, it must be taken into account that the two countries are located in the area that for centuries has been the site of major historical cataclysms, the borderline between civilizations. For this reason, it was not always that the two nations found themselves under the same 'civilizational umbrella', which has significantly affected the mentality of both societies.

It is but natural that the historiosophy of the Ukrainian-Polish relationship involves the study of the history of the two nations. What were the reasons behind our cold relations? Sometimes, when the countries had to make one last effort to achieve reconciliation, some destructive force seemed to intervene. Attributing failure to a 'third force', many political scientists overlook, or rather close their eyes to the fact that for centuries struggle for their statehood has been a high priority for the two great nations who live side by side. Unfortunately, it often resulted in political struggle between the countries, and statehood was gained at the cost of the other nation. As to 'third forces', they profited from the discord.

Recently, another theory has become quite popular: for complete Ukrainian-Polish reconciliation, we need a 'uniform historical truth'. Though some politicians maintain that it is their point of view and 'their truth' that represents the 'uniform absolute truth', a claim that distorts the very idea of partnership. A Bible verse about wisdom is quite appropriate here, 'You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free' (John 8:32). The truth about the Ukrainian-Polish relationship is best expressed in the words of the great Polish statesman Józef Piłsudski, 'There is no independent Poland without independent Ukraine as well as there is no independent Ukraine without independent Poland'. It often happens that frequent repetition of the words obliterate their meaning; still this is a crucial idea, and the success of our present relationship lies in acknowledging this truth.

Poland was the first to recognize the state sovereignty of Ukraine, which was evidence of maturity of the Polish political elite and a breakthrough in the relations between the two states. The event was a sign of a powerful intellectual comprehension of the importance of Ukrainian statehood for the strengthening of Poland. Intense discussions in the Polish emigrant circles had preceded that historical decision. The then position of Jerzy Giedroyc, editor of the Paris-based journal 'Kultura' was a true manifestation of political courage.

In 1952, 'Kultura' published a letter of Józef Majewski, a young priest from the South African Republic, to Jerzy Giedroyc, which generated a discussion about the eastern borders of Poland in the emigrant circles. 'Let Lithuania rejoice over its Vilnius, let the blue-yellow flag fly over Lviv – then our eastern and northern neighbours will trust us. In cooperation with Ukraine and Lithuania, the Federation of Central and Eastern Europe will become an accomplished fact,' wrote Majewski [1, p. 306]. It should be mentioned that Jerzy Giedroyc did not consider that establishing good neighbourly relations with Ukraine and Belarus excluded the possibility of friendly relations with Russia and Germany; on the contrary, in his opinion, a holistic approach to the problem was an optimal one. 'Our major objective has to be normalization of the Polish-Ukrainian and Polish-German relations alongside the defense of the state sovereignty of Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic states, which involves our close cooperation with them. We have to realize that the stronger our position in the East is, the more invulnerable our position in Western Europe will be,' stated Jerzy Giedroyc [4, p. 246].

Nowadays nobody can deny that Poland actively promoted the interests of Ukraine in the international political arena. Poland supported Ukraine's joining the Council of Europe and many international organizations at regional levels, becoming a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council in 2000-2001. Despite Russia's resistance, Ukraine signed the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement.

The following periodization of the Ukrainian-Polish partnership may be suggested. The 1990s were the period of creating a political basis for the development of interstate relations between the two countries; at the regional and European scale, Ukraine was presented as a democratic EU-aspiring country. At the turn of the century, the foundations for the beginning of Ukrainian integration with the European Union were laid.

According to a famous Polish diplomat Andrzej Mayakovsky 'the decisive factor which predetermined the current relationship between Ukraine and Poland was the negotiation process

initiated by President of the Republic of Poland Aleksander Kwaśniewski during the 2004 political crisis in Ukraine. The crisis provoked by the falsification of the presidential election in Ukraine was peacefully resolved due to A. Kwaśniewski's diplomatic skill. The success of the initiative was ensured by the positive trend in bilateral relations, 'at the presidential level in particular, which made it possible to promote the dialogue with all the parties in the dispute' [6, p. 463].

The failures of the two anti-European campaigns inspired by the Kremlin in 2004 and 2014 did not discourage it in its political ambitions concerning Ukraine; Russia resorted to full-scale intrusion disguised as 'fratricidal war'. It was Poland who once again called on the European Union not only to condemn the act of aggression but to work out effective measures in order to curb the aggressor.

Developing its policy, Ukraine draws heavily on the Polish experience of transformation of society. Poland's accession to NATO was a real test for the Ukrainian-Polish relations. Notwithstanding the adverse reaction of Russia, Ukraine expressed its complete support for the act; it not did not respond to the anti-Ukrainian provocation in Przemyśl on the eve of NATO's final decision on Poland's full membership.

The opponents of NATO expansion predicted that Polish membership in the North Atlantic Alliance would drastically change the Ukrainian-Polish political and military relations. The prediction was never fulfilled. Pursuing consistent and reasonable policy aimed at developing cooperation with the North Atlantic Block, Ukraine managed to prevent the negative scenario. It signed the Ukraine-NATO Charter, opened the first NATO information centre on the territory of the countries which used to be part of the former USSR, Ukraine is a current member of the 'Partnership for Peace' NATO Programme. These achievements can also be attributed to the political activity of the President of the Republic of Poland, who consistently stated that Poland as a EU member would not turn away from its nearest neighbor, that it would maintain cooperation with Ukraine and support European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine.

'Ukraine's joining the Anti-Terrorist Coalition should also be considered in the positive context of Polish eastern policy. From the beginning of the Iraq operation, the Ukrainian brigade served as part of the Multinational Division Central-South' [6, p. 464].

The formation of the Ukrainian-Polish Peace Force Battalion that later turned into the Polish-Ukrainian-Lithuanian brigade was a new stage of Ukrainian-Polish military cooperation. Currently, the brigade can become a strong link joining Ukraine, on the one hand, and NATO members Poland and Lithuania, on the other.

The Polish political elites keep on emphasizing the necessity of close economic cooperation lest their Ukrainian counterparts get a feeling that having become a member of the European Union, Poland lost interest in Ukraine and will prevent its access to the European markets. Polish-Ukrainian Economic Forums attended by the Presidents of both countries have become traditional events. Another representative example of our economic cooperation is significant Ukrainian investments in Poland such as the acquisition of Polish Huta Częstochowa Steel works by ISD (Industrial Union of Donbass) and the purchase of FSO (Passenger Automobile Factory) shares by the UkrAVTO Corporation (Ukrainian Automobile Corporation) [6, p. 464].

Gradually, we succeed in changing the attitude of certain Polish politicians and businessmen, who regard Ukraine solely as a large market, especially for their food products and agricultural raw materials.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, energy resources is one of the key issues of political and economic life. At one time the Polish political circles regarded participation in the Yamal-Europe pipeline project, which bypasses Ukraine, as a solution to their energy problem. Russia went further, though, and started the construction of the Nord Stream sub-sea pipeline bypassing the territories of Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine. Commenting on the project, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland A. D. Rotfeld warned that 'Poland should not allow Germany and Russia to ignore it and to enter into agreement at the expense of its interests. The construction of this pipeline is evidence that such an agreement is not hypothetical but is being put into practice, quite quickly' [5, p. 152].

Russia did its best for the Odessa-Brody-Plock Oil Transportation Project to fail. Using rich oil fields in the Caspian Sea, Ukraine and Poland could reinforce their energy security. Thus from economic and, more importantly, from national security perspective, it is a worthwhile project for both countries.

The past decades witnessed the strengthening of Ukrainian-Polish interstate relations institutionalized at a wide range of levels – from the level of presidential committees to the regional one. The development of cooperation between local government bodies is of special importance. Here Poland has considerable achievements as, thanks to the administrative reform, the voivodeships obtained special right to external economic activity. A different tendency is revealed, though. The number of agreements between the Polish voivodeships and the Ukrainian oblasts is surprisingly large; at the same time, much less attention is given to regional cooperation in the Bug and the Carpathian Euroregions. For Ukraine, the importance of this cooperation can hardly be overestimated; as Germany used to give Poland its first lessons in Euroregional market economy, so Poland can ease the process of economic and spiritual rapprochement with Europe for Ukraine.

One of the main things that hampers free interchange between the two countries is visa regulations for Ukrainian citizens, which came into effect after Poland had joined the European Union. It should be mentioned that Poland was probably the only candidate for the EU membership that kept delaying the imposition of visa requirements despite pressure from Brussels; it also gave Ukraine valuable help in the creation of regulatory and legal, and infrastructural basis for signing the Readmission Agreement.

'In 2003, the Presidents of Ukraine and Poland reached a decision and the two parties signed the agreement on the simplified procedure of crossing the border between the two states upon Poland's joining the European Union. There has been devised an unprecedented formula of asymmetrical visa regulations: it allows the citizens of Poland to travel visa free to Ukraine and waives visa fee for the citizens of Ukraine. This decision minimized possible negative consequences of Poland's EU accession for the development of our relations' [6, p. 463-464]. On Poland's joining the Schengen area, simplified procedures for visa obtaining were established for many categories of Ukrainian citizens. Poland issues more visas for the citizens of Ukraine than any other EU member state. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, in 2014 Polish Consulates in Ukraine issued more than 831 000 visas, 15 per cent more than in 2013. The number of visa rejections and refusals was 2.66 per cent (more than 22 000 persons) [2]. Such consistent visa policy prevents the dissociation of Ukraine from the European Union and contributes to building a barrier-free Europe.

Still, establishing interpersonal contacts remains a big problem. Complicated historical past and anti-Ukrainian propaganda in the Polish People's Republic were factors in formation negative stereotypes about Ukrainians. The popular view is that the problem will get resolved with the departure of the generation that witnessed the past tragedies; and with it, will lift the historical burden of Ukrainian-Polish relationship. This point of view is hardly acceptable as the theory of the 'generation war' will not help to cure the problem. On the contrary, the older generation should share their dramatic experience and let young people learn from the mistakes in our as our future lies in peace, not war. It is a hard road but our two peoples have to take it.

In 1999, a Polish director Jerzy Hoffman made a film adaptation of Henryk Sienkiewicz's book 'With Fire and Sword'. The film proved to be a true test of social maturity for Ukrainian and Polish people. A new interpretation of the famous novel generated a lot of discussion in both countries. On the positive side, contrary to some fears, the film garnered public and press acclaim both in Ukraine and Poland, which was evidence of our readiness to start an open dialogue about the future of the Ukrainian-Polish relationship and to learn from the mistakes of our past.

On the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we passed the turning point in dealing with Ukrainian-Polish historical controversies. The 'Joint Declaration of the Ukrainian and Polish Presidents on Reconciliation' (1997) signed by Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Leonid Kuchma marked the beginning of a new stage in our relations. In 2003, thanks to joint efforts of the Presidents, Poland and Ukraine commemorated the 60th anniversary of the Volhyn tragedy. The act of reconciliation was an important step to enhance understanding and cooperation between our two peoples. Another important historical event which

helped overcome mutual distrust was the opening of the Polish military memorial or the Cemetery of the Defenders of Lwów, also called the Cemetery of Eaglets, in Lviv on June 24, 2005 [6, p. 464].

President Petro Poroshenko and the Ukrainian government maintain Ukraine's consistent approach to the process of reconciliation between the two nations. In his speech before the Polish Parliament in December 2014, Poroshenko quoted the famous words from a pastoral letter sent on November 18, 1965 by Polish bishops of the Roman Catholic Church to their German counterparts, 'We forgive and ask for forgiveness' [1].

The above mentioned acts and decisions laid a solid foundation for overcoming the most formidable, from historical memory perspective, obstacles to rebuilding trust and to accepting the bitter truth about the tragedies that struck the Ukrainian and Polish peoples in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Now Ukraine and Poland face a big challenge – to design a new regional security system as a model of cooperation and partnership among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, cooperation and partnership that will enable us to turn the page of conflicts that, unfortunately, were part of our history. Much effort is required in order implement the forecast of the famous American political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski, who has reasonable grounds to state that four countries – France, Germany, Poland, and Ukraine – will be the core of the European security system after 2010 [3, p. 86].

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Цепенда Ігор. Україна і Польща перед викликами XXI століття. *Журнал Прикарпатського університету імені Василя Стефаника*, 1 (4) (2014), 21–26.

В основі українсько-польських відносин лежать пошуки спільної стратегічної мети, яка на кожному історичному етапі втілюється в життя народів-сусідів. Складність міждержавного

партнерства пов'язана із розташуванням України й Польщі на цивілізаційній межі, на котрій відбувались історичні катаклізми. Водночас упродовж століть пріоритетом суспільного розвитку була боротьба обох народів за державність. Новим етапом українсько-польського єднання стало визнання Польщею незалежності України, що засвідчило зрілість польської політичної еліти. Польща доклала багато зусиль для пропаганди інтересів України на міжнародній арені. Визначена періодизація процесів зміцнення українсько-польського партнерства.

Досвід Польщі на шляху трансформації суспільства став для України платформою для моделювання свого політичного курсу.

Польща як член Європейського Союзу всіляко підтримує Україну в її євроінтеграційному та євроатлантичному русі. Посилюється економічне співробітництво. Важливою ланкою міждержавних зв'язків став розвиток співпраці на міжрегіональному рівні, між органами місцевого самоврядування. Поступово вирішується питання вдосконалення візового режиму, налагоджуються міжлюдські контакти. На порозі XXI ст. відбувся перелом у свідомості українців і поляків щодо складних періодів в історії українсько-польських відносин у минулому.

**Ключові слова:** Україна, Польща, історіософія, українсько-польські відносини, міжнародне партнерство, політичні еліти, євроінтеграція, візовий режим, регіональна безпека.