



# UKRAINE'S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE: THE VIEW FROM POLAND

By Valeriy Chaly, Mykhail Pashkov

In February 2000, the Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies, assisted by the sociological firm GFK Polonia, performed a sociological study among Polish experts. We polled 100 employees of the offices of the President and Prime Minister, Polish ministries and agencies, specialised committees of the Seim and Senate, experts from non-governmental analytical centres, as well as Polish businessmen and employees working with Ukrainian partners.

The results obtained during the poll provide an opportunity to better understand the position of Polish governmental, scientific and business circles concerning Ukraine's role and place in the world, the formation of its international image, the factors effecting this process, and the present status of Ukrainian-Polish relations.

## THE IMAGE OF UKRAINE, ITS ROLE AND PLACE IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

The specificity of the assessment of Ukraine's international image by Polish experts is conditioned, to a large extent, by their positive perception of a strong European vector in Ukraine's foreign policy, and by the positive dynamics of bilateral Ukrainian-Polish relations. Active political contacts at the top level should be kept in mind (the presidents of the two countries have held more than 20 meetings), as well as the settlement of sensitive issues (Declaration of Reconciliation), and the deepening of economic co-operation between the countries. **It is not surprising that 35% of Polish experts describe bilateral relations as «active progress», 47% — as «moderate progress», and only 6% — as «stagnation and deterioration»<sup>1</sup>.**

**50% of Polish experts assess Ukraine's international image as «relatively positive», 11% — as «positive»; 27% of those polled suggest that it is «relatively negative», and only 3% say that it is «negative». Therefore, the overwhelming majority (61%) of Polish state, scientific and business establishments considers the international image of our state to be generally positive. 54% of Polish experts are convinced that Ukraine's image is «improving»; 35% of those polled see «no significant change», and only 7% believe Ukraine's image to have «worsened».**

The course towards integration into European structures chosen by Ukraine's leadership meets the interests of Poland (a NATO member and EU candidate). The Polish elite is interested in the internal stability of its neighbouring state and, most importantly, in the irreversibility of its European choice. At the same time, the UCEPS poll showed that many people in Poland are not certain about the irreversibility of Ukraine's movement towards Europe. **The majority of respondents (60%) named «inconsistency in the implementation of the state's foreign political course» as a negative factor affecting Ukraine's international image.**

Poland encourages Ukraine's integration into European structures. Ukraine's relations with other countries were evidently viewed from the same angle. Expert assessments of the positive dynamics in Ukraine's bilateral relations with world countries are presented in the Diagram below.

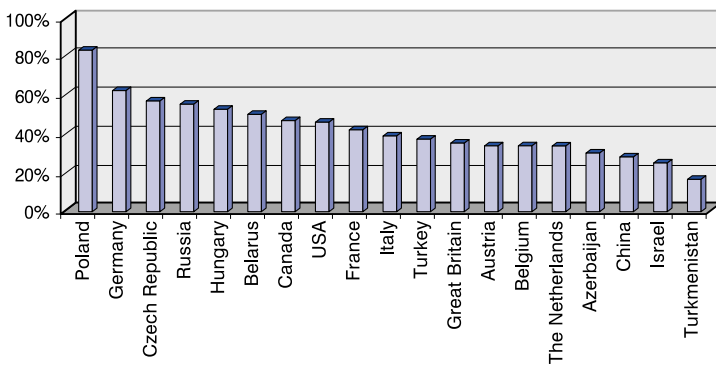
A group of nine countries stands out where progress in relations was noted by more than 40% of those polled: **Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Russia, Hungary, Belarus, Canada, the USA, and France.** The estimates of the Polish experts, therefore, correspond to the priority directions of Ukraine's policy (Europe, Russia, USA).

**The Polish experts' attitude to the «Russian» vector of Ukraine's foreign policy is evidently cool<sup>2</sup>.** For example, Russia ranks only

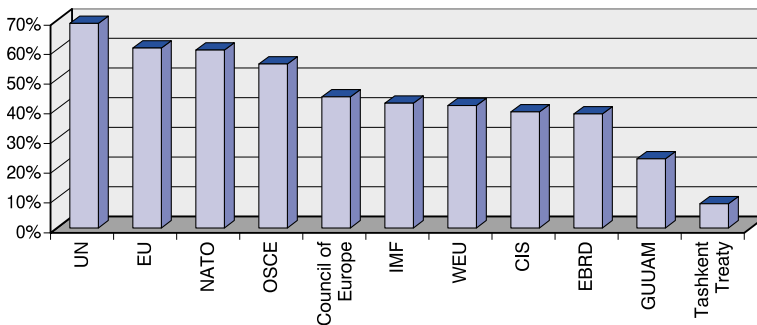
<sup>1</sup> Experts were offered the following choice of answers: active progress, moderate progress, instability, declarative co-operation, stagnation, deterioration.

<sup>2</sup> This may be partly explained by conflicts in relations between Poland and Russia that have been aggravated lately.

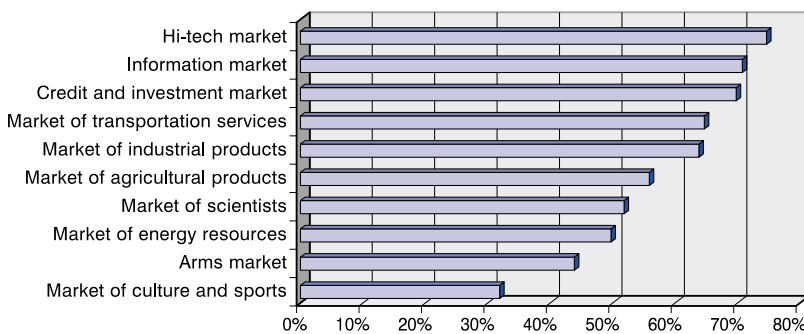
**Progress in Ukraine`s relations with other countries, % of the polled**



**Progress in Ukraine's relations with international organisations, % of the polled**



**Ukraine's influence on international markets is «minimal» or «insignificant», % of the polled**



fourth on the scale of Ukraine's bilateral relations with other countries. What is significant is that 59% of those polled consider «Ukraine's economic dependence on Russia» a negative factor in Ukrainian-Polish relations.

The majority of Polish experts refrained from assessing Ukraine's co-operation with a number of countries: Italy (51% of those polled), Austria (52%), the Netherlands (52%), Turkey (53%), Azerbaijan (60%), China (61%), Israel (66%), and Turkmenistan (77%). One of the reasons for this lies in the **absence of information regarding Ukraine's international contacts; 60% of respondents consider this to be a negative factor in Ukrainian-Polish relations.**

In general, Polish experts positively characterised the level of Ukraine's co-operation with international organisations. This is clear from the next Diagram. Ukraine's contacts with the UN were given a particularly high estimate (progress was noted by 69% of those polled)<sup>3</sup>, EU (61%), NATO (60%), and OSCE (55%).

A more restrained (44%) assessment of Ukraine's relations with the Council of Europe is caused by the negative impression of Ukraine's non-fulfilment of its commitments with respect to that organisation. Ukraine's uneasy relations with international financial organisations (IMF, EBRD) were also reflected in the answers given by respondents (42% and 38%, respectively).

Polish experts are relatively pragmatic (and generally pessimistic) when assessing Ukraine's relations with international institutions within the boundaries of the former Soviet Union. Ukraine's relations with the CIS were described as «progressive» by 39% of those polled, relations with GUUAM — by 23%, and with the Tashkent Treaty — by only 8%. Clearly, Polish experts are not very optimistic about Ukraine's contacts within the CIS, and this subject is of little interest to them: 35% of those polled were unable to assess Ukraine's relations with the CIS at all, 63% had no definite opinion about relations with GUUAM, 86% — with the Tashkent Treaty.

While Polish experts gave Ukraine's foreign policy relatively high assessment<sup>4</sup>, Ukrainian positions on world markets were viewed far more pessimistically (see Diagram). Those polled suggest that Ukraine is badly represented on the following markets: **high technologies** (Ukraine's influence was described as «minimal» or «insignificant» by 74% of the experts), **information resources** (70%), **credits and investments**

<sup>3</sup> Ukraine's election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 1999 had a positive effect on this assessment.

<sup>4</sup> Foremost, on the European direction.

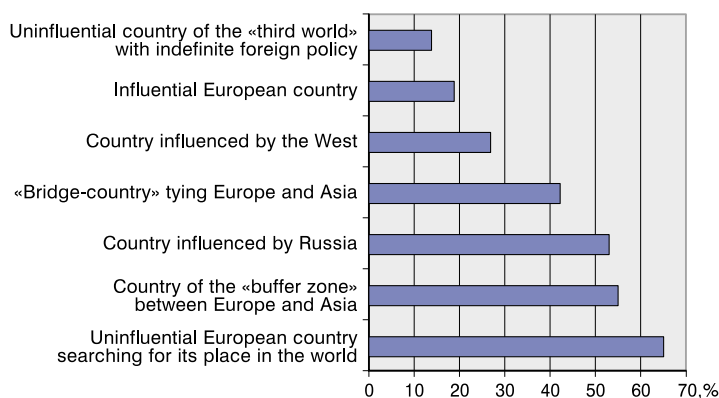


(69%), transport services (64%), industrial products (63%) and agricultural products (55%).

Polish experts give a somewhat higher assessment of Ukraine's presence on the following markets: **energy resources** (25% estimated its influence as «significant» or «noticeable», another 21% — as «average»), **culture and sports** (22% and 39%, respectively), **arms** (13% and 26%).

**Polish assessments of Ukraine's role and place in the world give food for thought** (see *Diagram*)<sup>5</sup>. The majority (65%) sees Ukraine as

**Role and place of Ukraine in the world,**  
% of the polled



an «uninfluential European state searching for its place in the world». Along with its strong Europe-oriented direction, Ukraine's image is complemented by other features: a «buffer zone» state (55% of experts agree with this), a country influenced by Russia (53%), and a «bridge-country», tying Europe and Asia together (42%).

In this respect, the thoughts of Polish experts regarding the attitude to Ukrainians as an ethnic-national entity, prevailing in Poland, are significant. 50% of those polled suggest that Poles look at Ukrainians as a Slavic people, while 31% see them as Russians living in Ukraine; only 18% of respondents are convinced that the attitude to Ukrainians as a unique, mature nation prevails in Poland.

### FACTORS INFLUENCING THE FORMATION OF UKRAINE'S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE

Among the factors that most actively influence the formation of Ukraine's international image, Polish experts chose **the state's leadership** (88% of those polled), **Ukrainian diplomacy** (51%) and **the Ukrainian people** (50%). They also mentioned **mass media** (25%), **subjects of foreign economic activity** (23%), the Ukrainian diaspora (17%), and world-famous Ukrainians (11%). In the opinion of Polish experts, the impact of **Ukrainian public organisations** and **PR agencies** on the formation of Ukraine's international image is insignificant (7% and 1%, respectively). In our view, it is not only a matter of insufficient activity on the part of Ukrainian mass media and public organisations, but the overall underdevelopment of these important institutions of civil society in this country.

Polish assessments of the factors negatively affecting Ukraine's international image actually coincide with those of international organisations, expert agencies and prominent mass media. **The set of negative factors has become traditional for Ukraine. Unfortunately, they turn into a stereotype unfavourable to our country** (see *Diagram on the next page*).

In the first place, Polish experts name **the corruption of authorities** (85%), followed by the **low level of economic development and the**

<sup>5</sup> Ukraine's image in the eyes of Polish experts is formed under the influence of the following positive factors: (a) geographic proximity, the long historical experience of relations between the two nations; (b) coinciding national interests, foremost with respect to integration into European structures; (c) noticeable progress in bilateral political and cultural contacts; (d) the possibility of selling Polish goods on the Ukrainian market (expansion on EU markets is more difficult for Poland); (e) the use of Ukraine's transport potential, etc. The influence of negative factors is also significant. Among them: (a) Ukraine's economic crisis; (b) the danger of Ukraine transforming into a transit country transparent for illegal migration; (c) a high level of corruption and organised crime; (d) economic dependence on Russia.

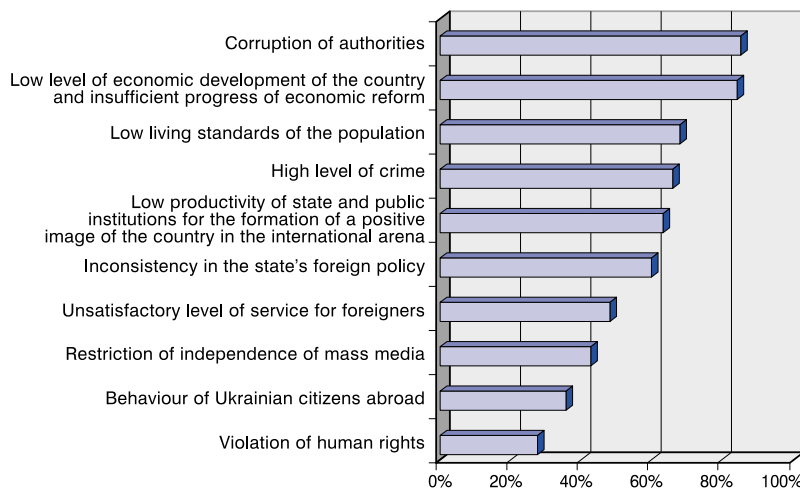
**insufficient progress of economic reform (84%), the population's low living standards (68%), and crime (66%).** Almost half of those polled (48%) point to the **low level of services for foreigners in Ukraine.** As the Diagram makes clear, other factors, such as the behaviour of Ukrainians abroad, or human rights violations in Ukraine, are less important for Polish experts.

When answering the question: «What damaged Ukraine's international image and what improved its international image in 1999?», Polish experts named the «traditional» Ukrainian problems (corruption, Chornobyl, non-fulfilment of Ukraine's international commitments) as negative factors; positive factors included Ukraine's seat on the UN Security Council, co-operation with European and Euro-Atlantic structures, and Ukraine's peace-keeping efforts. A more detailed list of those factors is presented in the Table below.

What is interesting is that very few Polish experts named ratification of the Big treaty with Russia in 1999 among the positive factors (5%) and Ukraine's participation in the «Sea Launch» project (4% of those polled). Arrests of Ukrainian ships and aeroplanes abroad, non-payment of the Russian gas debt, and the danger of default regarding Ukraine's foreign debt obligations had an insignificant negative impact on Ukraine's international image (only 5% of respondents).

Polish experts also presented their views on the priority steps for improving Ukraine's international image. The overwhelming majority (83%) suggests the **activation of economic reform** to be the first priority of Ukrainian authorities. The same number of respondents sees the need to **step up the struggle against corruption and crime.** 71% of experts suggest that improvement of the image will depend on **Ukraine's effective foreign policy.** 64% of those

**Factors that negatively influence the international image of Ukraine, % of the polled**



**Most important factors that influenced Ukraine's international image in 1999**

Positive factors		Negative factors	
Ukraine's election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council	61%	Mass media publications regarding corruption in the higher echelons of state power	42%
Deepening of contacts with European and Euro-Atlantic structures	59%	Problems associated with the Chornobyl NPP closing	39%
Democratic election of the President of Ukraine on constitutional terms	40%	Non-fulfilment of Ukraine's commitments with respect to the Council of Europe	38%
Ukraine's participation in the Balkan peacekeeping operation	38%	Negative assessment of the internal situation in Ukraine by international expert organisations	35%
Appointment of Viktor Yushchenko as Ukraine's Prime Minister	14%	Violations during the 1999 presidential elections	25%
Successes of Ukrainian sportsmen	5%	Non-fulfilment of commitments with respect to foreign creditors	21%

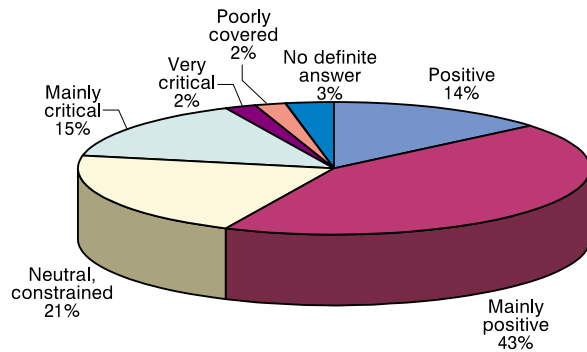


polled pointed to the **development of services for foreign nationals** as an important factor in forming a positive image for Ukraine.

Although the assessments of Polish experts cited above demonstrated an insignificant negative influence of Ukrainian human rights violations, 60% of respondents suggest that the authorities should pay special attention to this problem. Far fewer respondents share the view that the development of the Internet (36%) or establishment of a special expert group assigned with the task of creating Ukraine's international image (31%) would be important for Ukraine's image.

The position taken by Polish mass media when covering Ukrainian problems is important for improving bilateral relations. What we have in mind are the trends in information policy, and the formation of Ukraine's image among Poles. Polish experts assess the situation in this sphere as favourable (see Diagram below).

Coverage of Ukrainian issues in the Polish mass media

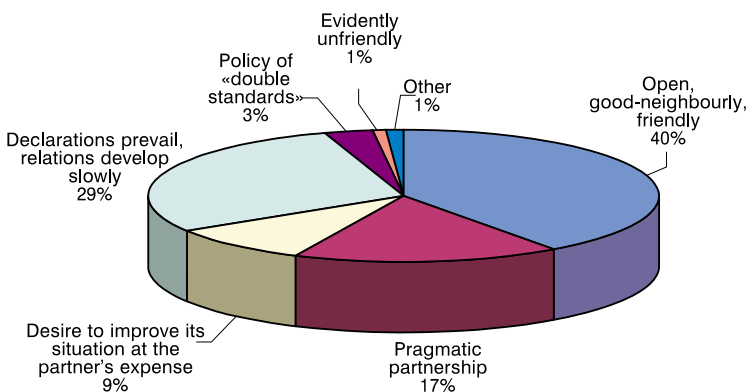


UKRAINIAN-POLISH RELATIONS

As we already noted, the majority of those polled stressed the positive dynamics of bilateral co-operation between Ukraine and Poland. The next Diagram shows that Ukraine's policy towards Poland is assessed favourably. 40% of the Polish experts called it «open, good-neighbourly and friendly»; 17% of those polled defined it as a «pragmatic partnership». At the same time, almost a third of respondents (29%) pointed to the declarative nature of Ukraine's policy towards Poland.

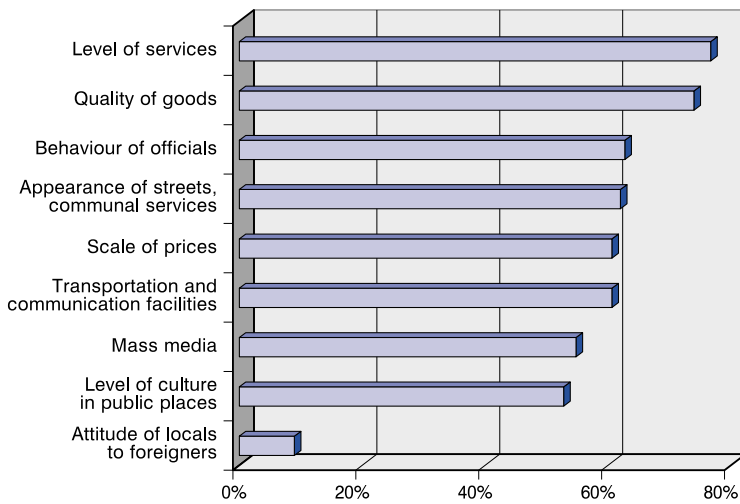
Among factors that do not contribute to the formation of a positive image of Ukraine among Poles, most experts name the **lack of information regarding Ukraine (60%)**, **economic dependence on Russia (59%)**, **the inconsistency of the foreign political course of Ukraine's leadership (57%)**, and **Ukraine's slow movement towards Europe (51%)**. Many respondents pointed to the **behaviour of Ukrainians in Poland (49%)**, **previous conflicts in bilateral relations and problems of ethnic Poles in Ukraine (46%)**. A third of those polled called **labour migration of Ukrainians to Poland and the quality of goods imported from Ukraine** as negative factors affecting relations between the two neighbouring states.

Assessment of Ukraine's policy towards Poland



As far as the present situation in Ukraine is concerned, our state has a totally negative appearance in the eyes of the Polish experts. This may seem strange, but their assessment of Ukraine's internal situation produces an entirely different image of Ukraine than the (generally positive) image based on the assessment of Ukraine's foreign policy. The next Diagram depicts the perception of Ukraine by 63% of the questioned Polish experts who had an opportunity to visit our country.

**Negative assessment of the internal situation in Ukraine,  
% of the polled**

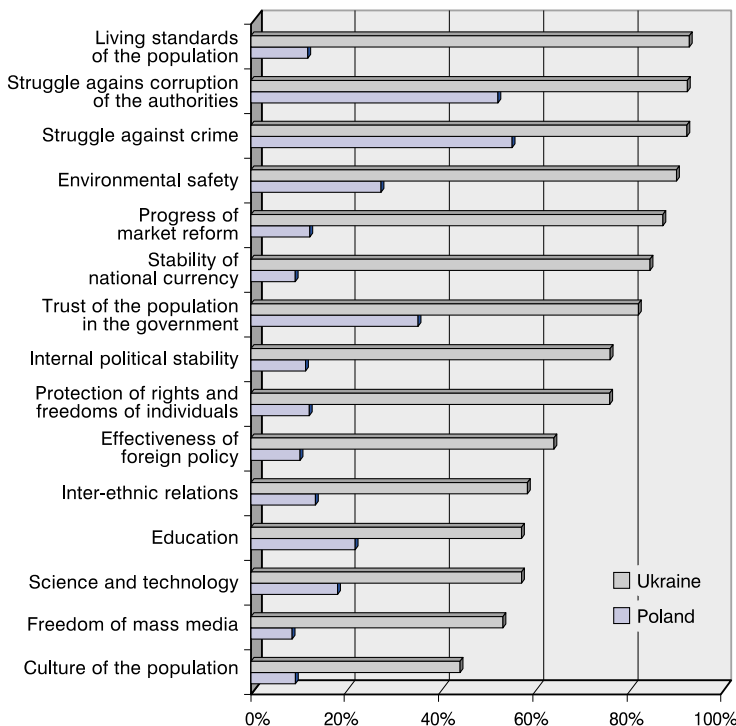


Comparing the present economic and socio-political situation in Poland and Ukraine, Polish experts gave Ukraine negative estimates<sup>6</sup> on all indices of the questionnaire (see Diagram below).

This conclusion is best illustrated with the following poll result: **97% of experts assume that Ukrainians live worse than Poles, and only 3% assess the standards of living in both countries to be similar.**

If we sum up the estimates above, Ukraine looks like a poor neighbour with numerous internal problems. Perhaps for this reason the attitude of Poles to Ukrainian citizens is very contradictory. 27% of those polled consider that Poles treat Ukrainians as equals, **38% demonstrate an indifferent attitude to Ukrainians, and nearly one-third (29%) suggest that the attitude to Ukrainian citizens as «second-rate» people prevails in Poland.**

**Negative assessment of the situation in Ukraine and in Poland,  
% of the polled**



A comparison of the assessment of national characters of Poles and Ukrainians appears interesting. The majority of Polish experts (58%) believe that the national character of Ukrainians is similar to that of Poles despite some differences; 38% are convinced that they are entirely different, and only 4% of those polled argue that the national characters of Poles and Ukrainians are the same.

<sup>6</sup> On a five point scale, from «5» (the situation is absolutely normal) to «1» (extremely negative).



## CONCLUSIONS

The specificity of the Polish perception of Ukraine is partly determined by Polish national interests and its policy priorities: NATO membership, expected accession to the EU, complicated relations with the Russian Federation, etc. The majority of Polish state, scientific and business establishments (61%) considers Ukraine's international image to be generally positive. 54% of those polled assume that the process of its formation is «improving». This assessment may be seen as an advance estimate of Ukraine's course towards European integration, officially supported by Poland<sup>7</sup>. Poland is objectively interested in Ukraine's stability, democracy and economic progress as a neighbouring country. However, the majority of Polish experts (60%) maintains reasonable doubts regarding Ukraine's consistency in implementing the European vector of its foreign policy.

Polish experts positively assess Ukraine's relations with Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Russia, Hungary, Belarus, Canada, the USA, and France. As far as international organisations are concerned, progress was evident in Ukraine's relations with the UN, EU, NATO and OSCE. At the same time, Ukraine's relations with the CIS were positively assessed by only 39% of those polled.

Assessments of Ukraine's international market positions are also low. According to Polish experts, Ukraine's influence on the markets of high technologies, information resources, credits and investments, transportation services and industrial products is especially weak. Therefore, on the one hand, experts generally positively assess Ukraine's actions as a political player; on the other hand, they hold a clearly negative assessment of Ukraine's positions in the world economy.

Ukraine's internal situation is viewed with concern and criticism. Among the basic negative factors, 85% of experts noted a high level of corruption of Ukraine's authorities, a low level of economic development (84%), and the Ukrainian population's low living standards (68%). The comparative estimate of the internal situation, living standards and acute problems of the two countries made by Polish experts make it possible to construct a relatively sad overall image of Ukraine as a poor neighbour of Poland with numerous unresolved domestic problems.

The somewhat contradictory nature of our country's image in the eyes of Polish experts had its effect on their definition of Ukraine's role and place in the world. The majority (65%) described Ukraine as an uninfluential European country searching for its place in the world. At the same time, 55% of experts agree that Ukraine is a «buffer zone» country; 53% believe that Ukraine remains under Russian influence.

Polish experts believe that the improvement of Ukraine's international image will depend on the effective actions of Ukraine's authorities in such spheres as stepping up economic reform, the struggle against corruption and crime, and a more efficient foreign policy.

The activity of Ukraine's leadership in the Polish direction was appreciated by experts assessing the present status of bilateral relations: 82% of those polled positively estimated the dynamics of Ukrainian-Polish co-operation. The majority of Polish experts (57%) pointed to the benevolent attitude of Polish mass media to Ukraine.

<sup>7</sup> Such support is provided by Poland's political (state) elite, actually questioned during this poll.