



UKRAINIAN FOREIGN POLICY AFTER THE 2002 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS: SUBJECT TO ADJUSTMENTS?



As a rule, foreign policy issues get less space in election manifestos than domestic socioeconomic problems.

However, according to an opinion poll by the Razumkov center held in February 2002, the majority of Ukrainians (65.7 per cent) think that foreign policy priorities will have a certain role to play in the 31 March vote. Indeed, for 19.4 per cent of people they will be the main factor. Therefore, foreign policy will not remain unnoticed.

In turn, the analysis of foreign policy positions of parties and blocs allows one to determine, at least approximately, the entire picture of the new parliament's priorities and to predict possible changes in Ukrainian foreign policy, since under the constitution it is the Supreme Council [parliament] that sets the guidelines of Ukrainian foreign policy.

This is why experts from the Razumkov center for politician and economic research, in a special election project, analyzed the parties' long-term programs and election manifestos, polled the leaders of prominent parties and found out ordinary Ukrainians' foreign policy priorities in a nationwide poll. The information was summed up in the National Security and Defense Journal (No 2, 2002) and put to a round-table discussion called "Elections 2002: Foreign-policy positions of political parties and blocs" held on 6 March and sponsored by the International Renaissance Foundation [the Ukrainian branch of the Soros Foundation].

The debate between representatives of seven parties and blocs, authoritative experts, foreign observers and journalists at the round-table meeting showed that despite the heated discussion and sometimes harsh statements, their positions on some of the important foreign policy issues coincided.

The summary of information from the journal and the round-table discussion was used as the basis for this article.

The road to parliament is paved with good intentions

The analysis of party programs and election manifestos shows that practically all the candidates support Ukraine's integration into the European and world community and its consolidation as an independent state and an equal partner in international relations. Three tasks of the same problem should be met: a) to secure a clear, consistent and effective foreign policy; b) to strengthen Ukraine's security; c) to secure Ukrainian interests in international economic relations.

At the same time, all the parties (regardless of their political positions) declare the following basic principles of Ukraine's foreign policy: peaceful coexistence, inviolability of borders, absence (inadmissibility) of territorial claims, observance of international law, non-interference into the internal affairs of other countries, mutually beneficial cooperation and rejection of force as a means of conflict settlement. The parties consider the priority of national interests the main foreign policy principle. (However, it is clear that the parties differ on the definition of national interests depending on their declared ideology.)

The situation concerning specific foreign policy priorities is more difficult. A comparison between parties' long-term programs and the election manifestos of the political blocs they formed produced quite interesting results.

Given the shortage of space and the understandable orientation towards domestic issues, foreign policy priorities in the blocs' election manifestos are the product of a difficult compromise. As a result, the programs are less specific or the foreign policy section has been simply dropped from the manifestos. (For instance, the Democratic Party of Ukraine has a clear pro-Western orientation, while the Democratic Union party supports a multidirectional foreign policy. As a result, the election platform of their bloc had nothing more than a statement on foreign policy being governed by national interests. Or, for instance, one of the five parties from the bloc For a United Ukraine supports a multidirectional foreign policy, another does not clearly specify its position in the West-East coordinates, while the other three support cooperation with Europe. In addition, one of the parties in the bloc supports Ukraine's neutral status, while two support cooperation with NATO. As a result, the consolidated election platform mentioned European integration and strengthening ties with CIS and Russia. Another example: the election manifesto of the Our Ukraine bloc did not include the "politically sensitive" demands to quit the CIS, mentioned in the programs of four out of 10 parties in the bloc.)

Another reason for "generalizing" foreign policy positions in election manifestos is the considerable difference in people's geopolitical attitudes. For instance, according to a poll held by the Razumkov centre in February (they polled 2,012 respondents aged 18 and higher in all Ukrainian Regions), 56 per cent of respondents in western Ukrainian Regions prefer contacts with EU countries and 45.1 per cent in eastern Regions think that cooperation with Russia should be the priority. Only 18.4 per cent of respondents in western Ukraine support Ukraine joining the Union of Belarus and Russia (50.3 per cent are against this), but in eastern Ukraine the number of people who support Ukraine's entry to the union reached 62.2 per cent.

As a result, voters see a kind of average version of good intentions by which it is very hard to judge the foreign policy positions of election blocs. To clarify their positions, experts from the Razumkov centre polled the leaders of prominent political blocs.

Review of foreign policy priorities long overdue

Judging by the orientation of election manifestos and the positions of the leaders of parties and blocs presented in the poll and announced during the round-table discussion, it is possible to predict that the future composition of parliament will take steps to strengthen its influence on the implementation of Ukrainian foreign policy. The leaders of parties and blocs are critical of the current level of parliament's influence on the implementation of Ukrainian foreign policy (they judged it as medium and low). They think that the parliament's influence should be improved to achieve balance in the president - parliament - Cabinet of Ministers triangle. Obviously, the increased role of parliament looks possible only if it forms a stable majority with clearly determined positions aimed at improving the efficiency of Ukrainian foreign policy. (It is worth noting that during the round-table discussion, the leader of the Democratic Party - Democratic Union bloc, Volodymyr Horbulin, said that the positions of party leaders could also include consensus, which can become a foundation for creating a majority in the future parliament.)

Analysis of political parties' and blocs' intentions to develop various forms of international cooperation and modernize the procedures of foreign policy implementation, laid down in the long-term party programmes and, partially, in election manifestos, provides reasons for assuming that the new parliament will revise the current fundamental priorities of Ukrainian foreign policy. Such a position is seen most clearly in the answers by the leaders of parties and blocs polled by the Razumkov centre. The majority of parties and blocs feel the need to approve a new document [on priorities]: they have already prepared (or are preparing) appropriate draft laws. Only the Green Party and the Women For the Future party propose to go no further than introducing amendments to the law currently in force.

It is true that the main priorities of Ukraine's foreign policy approved by parliament on 2 July 1993 are largely out of step with reality. Firstly, serious changes have occurred in the world and in the neighbouring countries. The European Union is enlarging: Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic have become NATO members; the Union of Belarus and Russia and the Eurasian Economic Community have been created. New challenges and threats have appeared and the world community, including Ukraine, should seek adequate responses. In addition, Ukraine itself has changed in the last eight years and a half. Secondly, a series of tasks topical at the time have been fulfilled: Ukraine has got rid of nuclear weapons, concluded large-scale treaties with its neighbours, signed an agreement with the EU, joined the Council of Europe and so on.

Foreign policy priorities: with Russia to Europe or one step West and one step East?

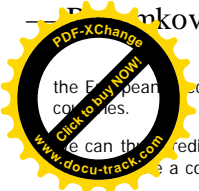
The priorities are mainly set in the EU- Russia system of coordinates. The Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc and the Green Party clearly view relations with EU countries as a priority. The Communist Party's priority is relations with Russia. (However, a Communist representative, Yevhen Marmazov, told the round-table meeting that the Communists were not against European integration. Ukraine is simply not ready for it and has to strengthen the national economy first.) The Our Ukraine bloc sticks to the official three foreign policy priorities: the EU, Russia and the USA. (Clarifying the bloc's position at the round-table meeting, former Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk named bilateral cooperation with Poland, Russia, Germany and the USA among the new priorities.) The bloc For a United Ukraine and the Socialist Party of Ukraine consider relations with EU countries and Russia as equally important. For a United Ukraine supplemented its position with the slogan: "For a united Ukraine in a united Europe, which includes Russia." Women For the Future supports the principle of a multidirectional foreign policy. However, first of all it values contacts with EU and neighbouring countries, primarily Russia.

Presenting the position of the United Social Democratic Party at the round-table meeting, [their representative] O.Mustafin said that Ukraine's main trade partner was the EU. However, contacts with Russia are extremely important and the two directions cannot be considered as alternatives. (For justice's sake we should note that the analysis of party programmes and election manifestos and the responses of party and bloc leaders given below do not allow us to conclude that relations with the USA and CIS countries are considered secondary or insignificant by the candidates.)

Incidentally, the positions of parties and blocs clearly conform to the foreign policy priorities of ordinary Ukrainians. According to an opinion poll held by the Razumkov centre, 31.6 per cent of people consider relations with Russia the priority in Ukrainian foreign policy, 31.4 per cent - relations with the EU, 20.6 per cent - with CIS countries and 4 per cent - with the USA.

It is quite important that all the political parties and blocs from the left to the centre-right absolutely unanimously support Ukraine joining the EU despite some differences in their foreign policy priorities. (At the same time, according to the representative of the Green Party, S.Moskin, future entry into the EU should be justified by appropriate calculations. The representative of the Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc, Serhij Komisarenko, said that joining the EU would be a very difficult task for Ukraine.)

By the way, the majority of Ukrainians also support European integration. According to an opinion poll held by the Razumkov centre, 57.6 per cent of respondents are sure that Ukraine should join the EU. (The opposite view is supported by 16.2 per cent of those polled, while 26.2 per cent were undecided.) It is interesting that the majority (60.4 per cent) of those supporting Ukraine's entry to the EU think that it should be done in the next five years. In other words, there is considerable potential in Ukrainian society for supporting the European direction of our foreign policy. However, Ukrainians will judge the benefits of European integration primarily on the financial effect from cooperation with EU.



...ction of our foreign policy. However, Ukrainians will judge the benefits of European integration primarily on the financial effect from cooperation with the EU. We can therefore predict that pro-European attitudes in the Ukrainian parliament will strengthen. This is also supported by the fact that the majority of parties and blocs approved the creation of a committee for European integration in the new parliament (the Communists are skeptical about this and the Socialists have not decided on their position).

Regarding prospects for developing relations with Russia and the USA, the majority of party and bloc leaders support stepping up cooperation with them. The comparison of their positions with public opinion is quite interesting.

The need to improve cooperation with Russia is not very much in doubt (62.5 per cent of those polled support this, 23.4 are satisfied with the current level of relations and 9.4 per cent of respondents voted for decreasing cooperation). But the views on relations with the USA were quite contradictory: 24.2 per cent of respondents support stepping up cooperation, 24.8 per cent think it is necessary to decrease it and 39.6 per cent are satisfied with the current level of relations.

The majority of parties and blocs think that Ukraine should play a more active part in the CIS. (The bloc For a United Ukraine and the Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc are satisfied with the current level of Ukrainian activity in the CIS). Incidentally, 55.1 per cent of Ukrainians support the position of most parties thinking that Ukraine should step up its activity in the CIS.

However, when it comes to cooperation with regional structures created in the CIS, the picture of positions of party and bloc leaders changes considerably. Firstly, all the political parties (apart from the Communist Party and the Socialist Party, which abstained) are against Ukraine joining the Union of Belarus and Russia. Secondly, the majority of parties and blocs do not support our country joining the CIS collective security system, the Tashkent treaty. (The Communists support it while the Socialists and Women For the Future abstained). Thirdly, the position of parties and blocs differ considerably as regards entering the Eurasian Economic Community. According to the table, four parties support this and three are opposed. Fourthly, the majority of political parties (apart from the Communists) support strengthening relations within the GUUAM [Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova, regional alliance].

Public opinion is somewhat different from the positions of party leaders. Our citizens were unenthusiastic about Ukraine joining the Tashkent treaty (15.2 per cent for, 40.7 per cent against and 44.1 per cent abstain), the Eurasian Economic Community (31 per cent for, 20.6 per cent against and 48.4 per cent abstain) or stepping up cooperation in GUUAM (25.8 per cent for, 23.4 per cent against and 50.8 per cent abstain). At the same time, a large part of respondents (45.2 per cent) support Ukraine joining the Union of Belarus and Russia.

Obviously, one can predict quite a reserved and pragmatic position in the new parliament regarding CIS regional structures. (It seems that a repeat of the crisis over Ukraine's entry into the CIS Parliamentary Assembly three years ago is unlikely in any form.)

The fact that the problem of Ukrainian entry to NATO did not cause extreme confrontation between representatives of the left and the right parties speaks for itself. The majority of parties and blocs (except the Communists and the Green Party) view the prospect (remote as it may seem) of Ukraine's entry into NATO as a generally positive thing. It is remarkable that the Socialists do not rule out such an option, either, with the proviso: "if NATO forms part of a new security system". We can assume that the question of Ukraine's neutrality will be put on the new parliament's agenda. This conclusion is based on the results of the round-table discussion, the poll of party and bloc leaders and the fact that only seven out of 26 parties participating in the elections support Ukraine's neutral status.

It is worth noting in this context that there has been a positive shift in Ukraine's public opinion on cooperation with NATO. (An opinion poll held by the Razumkov centre in August 2001 showed that 48.1 per cent of Ukrainians considered NATO an aggressive military bloc and 50.2 were flatly against the alliance's eastward expansion.) The results of an opinion poll held by the Razumkov centre in February 2002 can be an indirect confirmation of the positive change. According to the poll, 14.4 per cent of Ukrainians think that Ukraine should join NATO, 36.3 per cent do not rule out such a move, although they see it in a more distant future. At the same time, 30.5 per cent of those polled are sure that Ukraine should not enter the alliance under any circumstances and 18.8 per cent have not decided on this.

Forecast of new parliament's actions

This forecast is based on the analysis of party long-term programmes and the election manifestos of parties and blocs, a poll of their leaders and the outcome of the round-table meeting.

First, it seems obvious that the new parliament will try to increase its influence on the development and implementation of foreign policy in the president - parliament - Cabinet of Ministers triangle. However, this looks probable only if a stable majority with a clearly defined position is created. And the position should be directed at increasing the efficiency of Ukrainian foreign policy including its further orientation towards the economy, which was pointed out by all the parties and blocs.

Second, we can predict with a high degree of probability that the parliament will attempt a review of the main priorities of Ukrainian foreign policy, which will probably be approved in autumn. It seems that European integration clearly will be set as a priority. The strengthening of pro-European attitudes among the new composition of parliament (including the creation of a relevant committee) is an important aspect if we consider that the new parliament will need to solve important problems in preparation for Ukraine's entry into the EU in the next four years.

Third, there are grounds to assume that the new parliament will question Ukraine's neutral status, enabling it to join NATO.

Fourth, although a certain stand-off between the "pro-Western" right forces and the "pro-Russian" left forces in parliament will remain, radical steps (such as Ukraine's withdrawal from the CIS or, vice versa, accession to the Union of Belarus and Russia) will hardly be supported by the majority of people's deputies. It seems that the parliament's position regarding regional structures within the CIS will be quite reserved and pragmatic. The efforts of people's deputies will be directed at extending Ukrainian participation in leading international organizations and developing bilateral cooperation, primarily with Ukrainian neighbors.

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