

PROBLEMS OF EUROPEAN SECURITY: POSITIONS OF THE POPULATION OF UKRAINE



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The European continent is undergoing two processes which are important to Ukraine from the point of view of its foreign political priorities — the European Union's enlargement and, parallel to that, — the formation of its military component in the framework of the Common European Security and Defence Policy (CESDP).

In the wake of the terrorist acts in the USA, problems of security have assumed special importance. What should the EU's military structure be like? What functions will it perform, and how will it co-operate with NATO? What is Ukraine's place and role in the process of the European security system's transformation? How do Ukrainians feel about this?

In order to determine their stance on these problems, Sociological Service of Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies (UCEPS) named after Olexander Razumkov conducted a nation-wide poll from August 14 to 23, 2001, among 2007 respondents aged 18 and up¹.

The results give rise to serious questions. In particular, why do our citizens give preference to Ukraine's contacts with yet hypothetical European rapid reaction force rather than the real NATO? Why, despite the political and economic advantages of co-operation with the Alliance, is the attitude to it in Ukrainian society far from friendly?

NATO THROUGH THE EYES OF UKRAINIANS: A CHAIN OF PROBLEMS AND PARADOXES

Regarding the present and future systems of European security, one should begin with NATO — the key military-political player on the continent. What does NATO look like in the eyes of Ukrainians? We ought to remember that, according to the Democratic Initiatives Foundation, back in 1997 only 17.3% believed NATO to be an aggressive bloc. Since then, this number has grown sharply. There has been a stable trend in Ukrainian citizens' visibly negative attitude to NATO.

This can be seen from the returns of nationwide sociological polls conducted by UCEPS in June 2000² and August, 2001. The respective figures are presented in the following diagram "What is NATO primarily?" on the next page.

As can be seen from the diagram, despite the fact that the majority of Ukraine's population (53.8% in 2000, 51.9% in 2001) do not view NATO as an aggressive military bloc, the number of those who agree with this appraisal remains large (46.2% and 48.1%). That is, the number of respondents whose attitude to the Alliance is

¹ To be sure, the problems of European security are of a complex nature, and it is no wonder that some assessments made by ordinary citizens are rather relative, since almost a third of respondents is incompetent in those issues. Furthermore, respondent positions on a number of problems are only being formed and will change with time. This is not the reason however to ignore those assessments. Ukraine's course towards European integration (particularly in the defence sector) should be clear for the public, rest on popular support and meet people's expectations.

² The results of the survey were analysed in an article by UCEPS experts A.Bychenko and L.Polyakov "How much of NATO do Ukrainians need?". See: Razumkov Centre, 2000. — Kyiv, 2001, p. 390-398.



negative is nearly half the adult population of Ukraine. Also, some changes in positions can hardly be in NATO's favour. The number of those who view NATO as a defence alliance has dropped considerably (almost by 4%). The small percentage of those who are convinced that NATO is a peacekeeping organisation remains practically unchanged.

This trend in the public attitude to NATO corresponds absolutely logically to the trends in assessing the process of the Alliance's enlargement. Here, too, the comparison of the June 2000 and the August 2001 returns shows rather alarming trends.

The number of those who, for various reasons, believe the NATO enlargement process to be unfavourable has grown notably — from 46.1% to 50.2% (See Diagram "Attitude of Ukrainian citizens to NATO enlargement"). As we can see, among the half of respon-

dents concerned about the Alliance's eastward enlargement, the portion of those who believe that it may result in Ukraine's forced involvement in the NATO-Russia confrontation has grown considerably (from 19.5% to 26.2%). Thus, every fourth respondent is concerned about the development of relations between the Alliance and our eastern neighbour. (Let us note this "alarming figure", because we will return to "the Russian factor" in Ukraine — EU — NATO relations further). At the same time, one more trend is evident: a 6% decrease in the number of those who believe the NATO enlargement process to be favourable for the strengthening of the democratic security system in Europe.

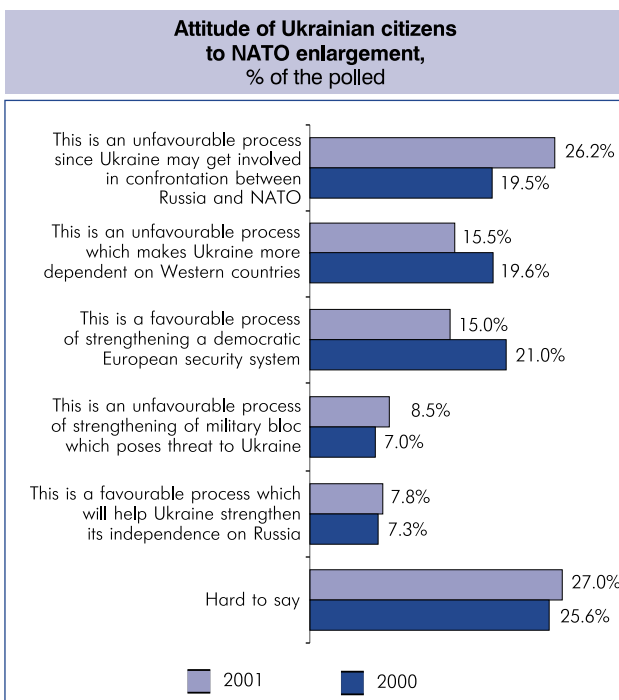
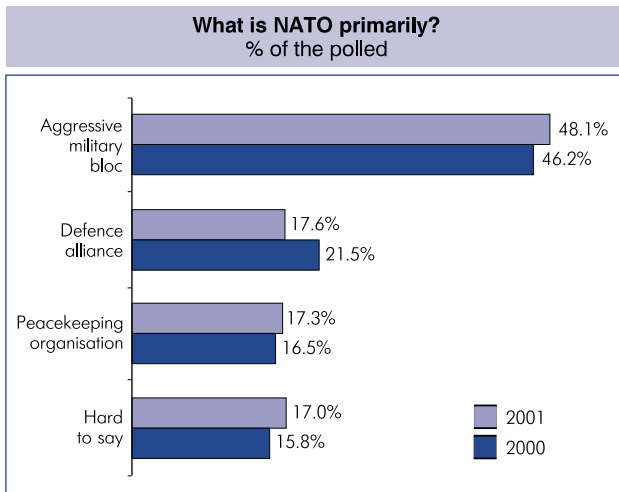
Superficially, the situation looks paradoxical. With no other international structure does Ukraine have such a high level of military co-operation, favourable both politically and economically. But almost every second (!) Ukrainian is critical about NATO and does not hail, mildly speaking, its eastward enlargement. So what are the reasons?

NEGATIVE REASONS

In our opinion, there are several reasons for Ukrainians' negative attitude to NATO. **First**, the negative stance is certainly caused by conservative-nostalgic sentiments with a certain part of Ukraine's population — the "legacy" of Soviet-era anti-NATO propaganda. **Second**, along with the strengthening of Russia's influence on Ukraine of late, Russia's relationships with NATO remain tense (particularly around the problem of the Alliance's enlargement). Russian mass media have very strong positions in Ukraine's information space, thus influencing Ukrainians' attitude to NATO. The biased and non-objective coverage of NATO's activities is directly projected on the Ukrainian public and reflected on its appraisal of NATO. **Third**, most Ukrainians are ignorant about the specific fields of Ukraine's co-operation with NATO, particularly within the framework of the Partnership for Peace Programme. Almost two-thirds of respondents (64.4%) either do not know anything at all about the programme, or that Ukraine participates in it. Western information about NATO does not reach the rank-and-file Ukrainian. The NATO Information and Documentation Centre in Kyiv can hardly be blamed for this. But its activity, especially during the military operation in the Balkans in 1999, for instance, can hardly be called highly effective.

These reasons may produce an impression that NATO is appraised by some nostalgically-minded Ukrainian who knows little about the Alliance and looks upon it through "eastern" eyes. But every joke, as we know, has a grain of truth...

The fourth reason is the attitude to the Alliance's operation in the Balkans (particularly the fact that Ukraine's position was not taken into account. The point is not some peculiar attitude of Ukrainians to Yugoslavia, but rather the fact that the majority of them (56.6%) are convinced that, unauthorised by the UN, NATO had no right whatsoever to intervene in that sovereign country's internal affairs, even to solve humanitarian problems³ (Diagram "Does NATO have a right to intervene in internal affairs of countries for solving humanitarian problems?").



³ It should be added that according to the results of the UCEPS survey held in June, 2000, 55.1% of respondents was sure that NATO had no right to interfere in the affairs of any other state without a UN sanction. The number of those who believes that NATO has such right fell almost two-fold — from 11.9% to 6.2%.



Thus, the majority of Ukrainians deny NATO this right. It should be especially stressed, however (and this is important in principle!), that the respondents hold the same position on the activities by the EU rapid reaction force. **Nearly half of the Ukrainian population (44.7%) are convinced that the EU has no right to intervene in internal affairs of countries to solve humanitarian problems.** At the same time, 37.7% believe that the EU does have that right. (In particular, 25.5% of respondents are positive that intervention actions can be applied to EU member- and candidate-countries; 6% — to countries on Europe’s territory; 6.2% — to any countries within the zone of EU interests). 17.6% of respondents abstained. Although the EU leadership cannot answer this question definitely. It can be presumed, however, that if a European “mini-NATO” is created, Ukrainian citizens’ attitudes to it will most likely be the same as their attitude to the existing Alliance, the Balkan actions by which show a certain “crisis of the genre” that has been proven by the recent events in Macedonia. What will integration with the EU look like in the eyes of most Ukrainians? — Joining “an aggressive military bloc”?

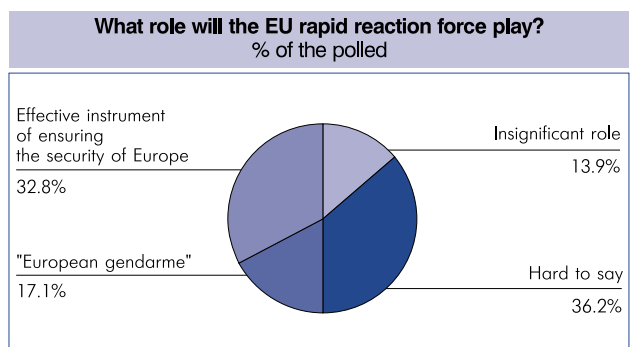
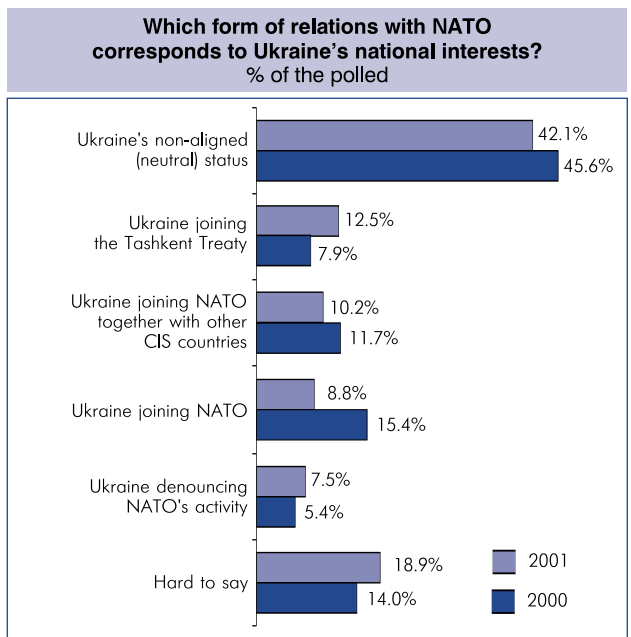
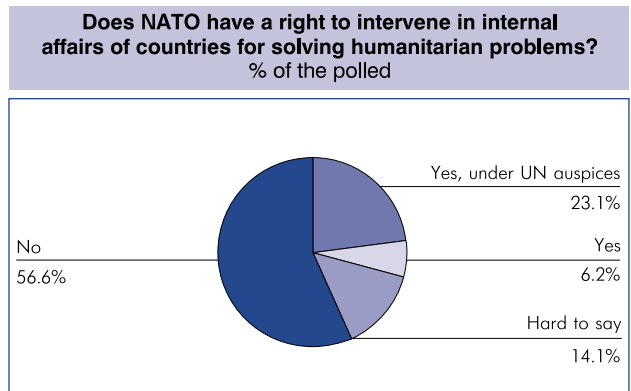
UKRAINE-NATO RELATIONS: POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

As can be seen from the above returns, the Ukrainian society shows a steady trend (at least for these two years) of criticism toward NATO among a plurality of the population. There may be different views on the Alliance, but it is impossible to disregard this powerful and most influential military-political structure. What should Ukraine’s relationships with NATO be like? The opinions held by Ukrainians on that score are certainly of interest.

A complete picture of opinions (in comparison with the year 2000) is shown in the Diagram “Which form of relations with NATO corresponds to Ukraine’s national interests?”.

Thus, out of the various forms of Ukraine’s relations with NATO, its non-aligned (neutral) status is believed by the major part of the population to best correspond to our national interests (although the number of those who favour this option has somewhat dropped — from 45.6% to 42.1%). There has been a visible (almost twofold) decrease in the number of respondents who support Ukraine joining NATO (from 15.4% down to 8.8%). But those who support “eastern” military integration, i.e. Ukraine joining the Tashkent Treaty, are not many, either — 12.5%, although there is a positive trend here.

Such opinions have multilevel motivation, and they cannot be explained by scepticism about NATO alone. Apparently, people are aware that Ukraine lies beyond the frameworks of both Western and Eastern military-political integration — beyond NATO’s and the EU’s enlargement processes and beyond the relevant transformations in the CIS. This situation objectively leaves Ukraine to be a neutral (non-aligned) “bridge-nation”.



HOW DO UKRAINIANS SEE THE EU SECURITY AND DEFENCE STRUCTURE?

The poll results give grounds to state that **the attitude of Ukraine’s population to the EU defence structure is generally reserved-positive.** Almost one-third of respondents (32.8%) believe that the EU rapid reaction force will be “an effective instrument of ensuring the security of Europe”, twice fewer (17.1%) say that it will be “a European gendarme” (Diagram “What role will the EU rapid reaction force play?”).

Thus, in Ukrainians' eyes, the EU rapid reaction force does not look like a gendarme structure (this opinion is shared by a mere 17%). Although a considerable number of respondents have no definite stance, one-third of Ukrainians believe this EU structure to be an effective instrument of response to crisis phenomena.

The motives for creation of the rapid reaction force by the European Union are assessed in a similar fashion. Every fifth respondent (21.2%) believes that the European Union is creating a defence structure to ensure stability and security in the region for safeguarding its own interests, 17.7% — to extend the EU integration to the military sphere, and 16.6% are convinced that the purpose of creating the rapid reaction force is to diminish the US influence through NATO (Diagram "Motives of creating the EU's own defence structure"⁴).

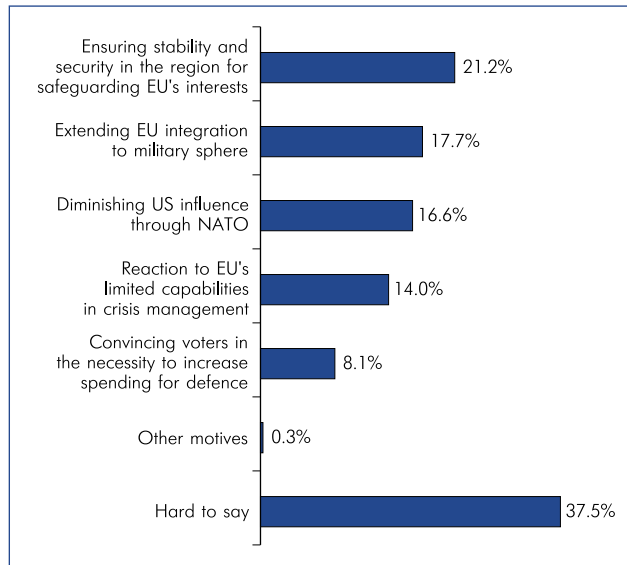
On the whole, the majority of respondents believe that the EU is creating its own armed forces as an instrument to ensure stability and security in the region for safeguarding its interests, as an element of its eastward enlargement and a factor of building up its capabilities in crisis management.

Thus, we have certain features of the attitude of peaceful Ukrainian citizens to NATO and the EU rapid reaction force. The comparison of their general characteristics looks rather contrasting. But this contrast is largely explained by some controversial and ill-reasoned actions in NATO's history, more so that the Alliance has a lot of opponents. But the EU rapid reaction force is starting "from a blank sheet" being rather a desired image of a military structure. And comparisons of the real and the desired are always in favour of the latter. At the same time, the European force is part of the European Union, relations with which are becoming more active after a certain "pause".

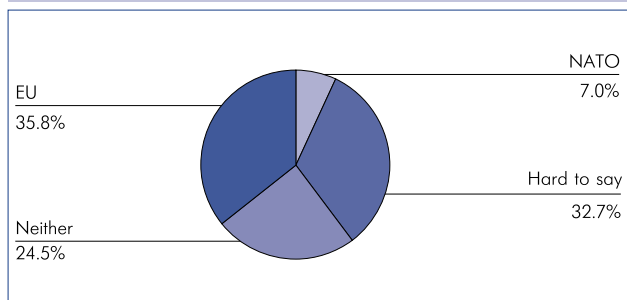
Therefore it is not strange that the question "Which organisation should Ukraine give preference: NATO or EU's military organisation?" was answered "EU's military organisation" by a plurality of respondents (35.8%). The votes in NATO's favour were five times (a mere 7%) fewer (Diagram "Which organisation should Ukraine give preference: NATO or EU's military organisation?").

However, along with the obviously prevailing favourable stance on Ukraine's co-operation with the European Union's military organisation, there is an evident fact that more than a half of respondents either abstained (32.7%) or were definitely against co-operation with the EU and NATO military structures, the latter part of respondents being the quarter of the population of Ukraine (this expressly corresponds to the above assessments of Ukraine's co-operation with NATO). But the following figure is even more expressive: the question whether Ukraine should "directly participate in forming rapid reaction forces and peacekeeping operations under the EU auspices" was answered positively by nearly a half of respondents (49.7%), negatively — by 23.6%, and 26.7% abstained.

Motives of creating the EU's own defence structure, % of the polled



Which organisation should Ukraine give preference: NATO or EU military organisation? % of the polled



⁴ Respondents were supposed to give all possible answers.



EU SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY: EFFECTS ON EUROPE

It is important to note how Ukrainian citizens assess certain effects of the European Union’s policy in the sphere of security and defence in the context of ensuring stability in Europe.

The most notable fact is that the greater part of respondents single out the independence of CESDP from NATO or the USA. (The priority of this position is apparently explained by the above-mentioned ambiguous attitude to the North-Atlantic Alliance). The assessments are presented completely in the Diagram “Possible effects of the EU’s Common European Security and Defence Policy on stability in Europe”.

Notably, every fifth respondent (20.2%) gives preference to the second position believing that the EU’s defence policy will facilitate stronger integration ties with non-member countries, particularly Ukraine.

At the same time, a far smaller number of respondents forecast worsening relationships between the EU

and NATO (14.7%) and worsening relationships with the USA and Russia (9%). That is, Ukrainians believe that the strengthening of the European Union’s military component will not affect its relations with its strategic partner — the United States — or cause conflicts with Russia that has been visibly stepping up activity in the European direction of late⁵.

On the whole, a considerable part of Ukrainians see CESDP as a “non-conflict” structure independent of NATO and the USA that will facilitate contacts with the nations which are beyond the frameworks of the EU’s enlargement.

The majority of Ukrainians (57.3%) are convinced, however, that the EU member-countries are interested in involving Ukraine in security and defence co-operation. (It should be noted that this opinion corresponds completely to the EU leadership’s position on Ukraine’s active participation in European peacekeeping forces. Such statements were made during J.Solana’s visit to Kyiv (April 19, 2001) and during the Yalta Ukraine-EU Summit (September 11, 2001)⁶.

The figures are presented in the Diagram “EU’s interest in involving Ukraine in security and defence co-operation”.

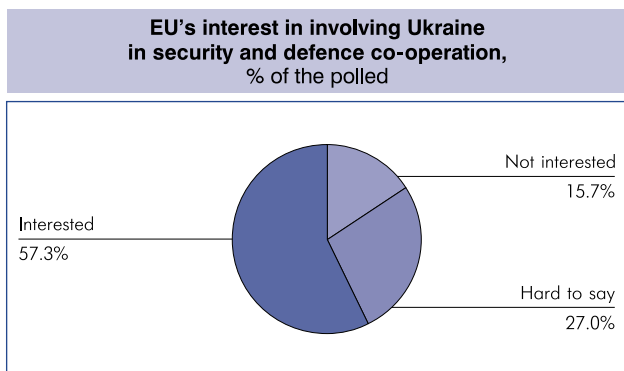
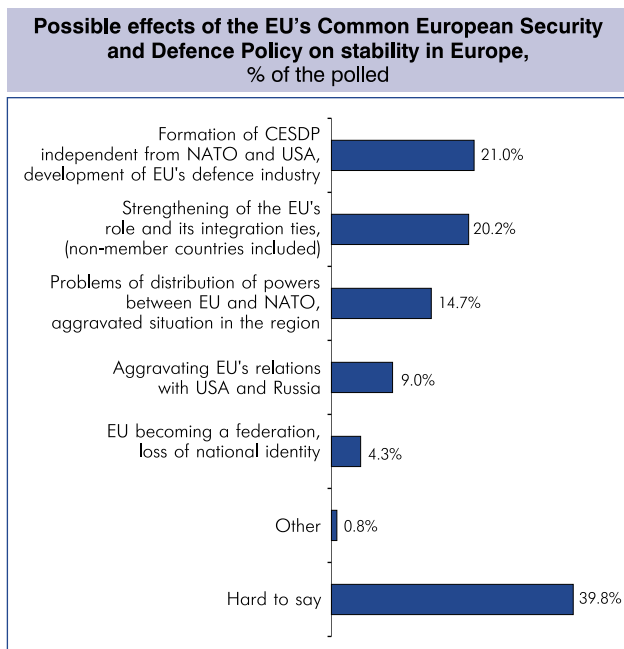
EU-NATO RAPID REACTION FORCE: AN ALTERNATIVE OR A COMPLEMENT?

So, a much greater part of respondents prefer Ukraine’s defence co-operation with the EU to that with NATO. But when it gets to prospects for co-existence of NATO and EU military organisations on the continent, the general picture of assessments becomes rather controversial. The public, generally negative about NATO, is aware, however, that the North Atlantic Alliance is now the world’s most powerful military bloc.

This awareness of real “weight categories” reflects on assessing the effects of CESDP on NATO. The greater part of respondents (18.4%) believe that nothing will threaten NATO for the nearest five years; 15.9% are convinced that NATO’s positions will become much weaker; 14.1% predict that the balance of power in the region will not change. Every tenth respondent (9.2%) is positive that NATO’s existence will be jeopardised while 8.7% are convinced that on the contrary, NATO will only gain from co-operating with the EU in security and defence. And finally, one-third of respondents (33.4%) restrained from any forecasts.

These answers boil down to the following: 41.2% of respondents think that the European military organisation will not weaken NATO’s dominant positions, and 25.1% are convinced that CESDP will be a serious competitor to the Alliance.

This balance of assessments is mirrored exactly in the answers to “what will be the EU rapid reaction force in relation to NATO?”. Only slightly more than one-fourth of respondents (26.5%) believes that the EU military force will be an alternative to NATO’s military structure.



⁵ Speaking at the 5th Economic Forum in St.Petersberg on July 13, 2001, the Chairman of the Russian Government M.Kasyanov emphasised the intensification of all-round contacts with the EU, stressing that “the share of the EU in Russia’s [foreign] trade turnover will rise from 35% to 50% within years”. See: WEB-site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation — www.mid.ru

⁶ At the Yalta Ukraine-EU Summit, President L.Kuchma stressed that the directions of co-operation in the area of the Common European Security and Defence Policy, including within the framework of relevant rapid reaction force, had been more clearly identified. See: Interfax-Ukraine, September 11, 2001.

The different opinion is shared by more than a third of respondents (36.7%) (Diagram “What will the EU rapid reaction force be in relation to NATO?”).

On the prospects for supra-national EU and NATO rapid reaction forces, their role and place in the European security system, the opinions of Ukrainians look rather cautious and pragmatic. A major part of respondents believe that NATO will retain its dominating positions on the continent, and the EU’s military organisation will rather be a complementing or duplicating structure.

A certain contrast in the assessments of CESDP and NATO, a prevailing orientation at co-operation with the EU’s military structure while being aware of NATO’s leading positions — this contradictory picture of assessments is an indirect reflection in public conscience of the difficulty of Ukraine’s self-identification within the geopolitical processes on the continent. NATO’s enlargement eastward (Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary) is almost five years ahead of the European Union’s eastward enlargement. For Ukraine, however, the establishment of relations with the EU has been placed in the framework of specific national tasks⁷, and

its membership in NATO is but a subject for discussions, a problem with many unknown quantities which is viewed in the society from diametrically opposite positions.

Apparently, co-operation with the EU’s military structure as NATO’s partner looks like a sort of compromise in the eyes of Ukrainians. **It should be noted, however, that the present level of trust in the EU’s supra-national force depends directly on how this structure will develop, whether it can avoid the errors and blunders that set NATO’s authority so low in the eyes of Ukrainians.**

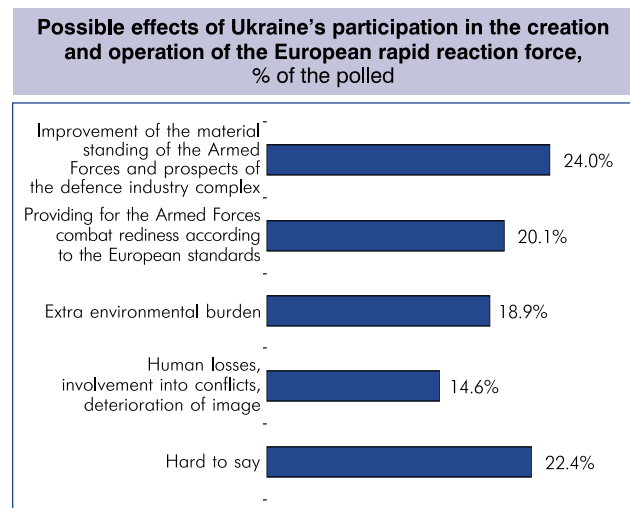
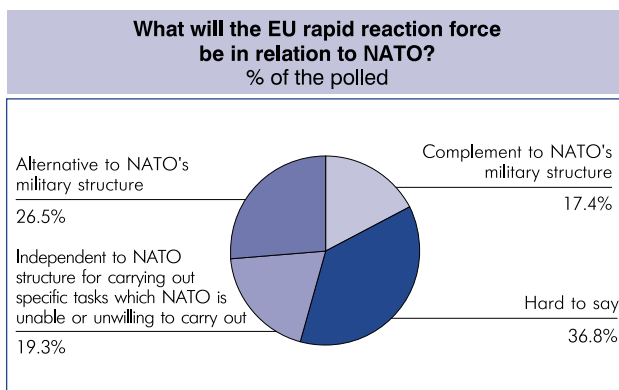
UKRAINE’S PARTICIPATION IN CESDP: GAINS AND EFFECTS

What can be expected from Ukraine’s possible participation in the creation and functioning of the European rapid reaction force? For the most part, the answers to this question were optimistically pragmatic, although peacekeeping activities are known to involve human losses and heavy employment of material and technical resources. The latter appears quite problematic for Ukraine, considering its present economic condition. But respondents regard this problem as secondary.

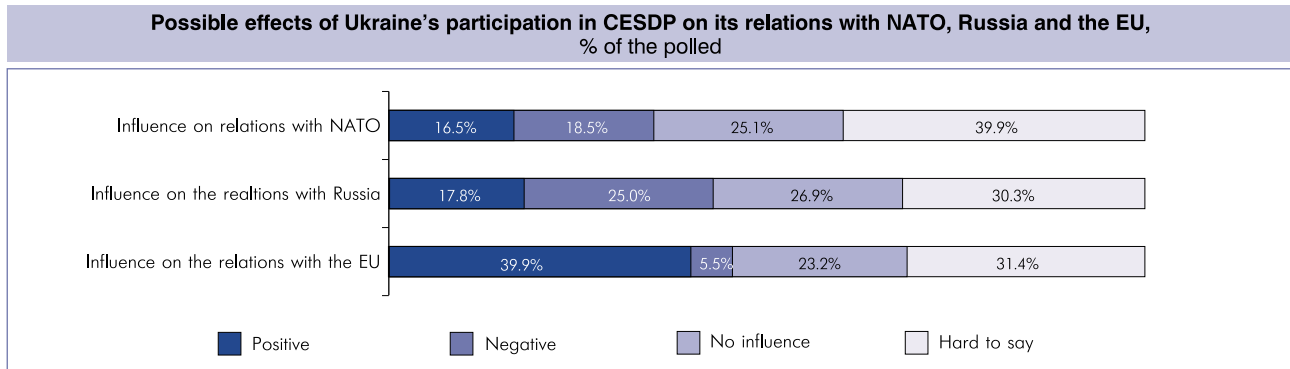
Thus, among the possible gains from the participation in the European force, the greater part of respondents (24%) give the top place to improved material state for the national armed forces and good prospects for the national defence industry. The second place is given to “providing for the Ukrainian Armed Forces combat readiness according to the European standards” (20.1%).

The figures are presented completely in the Diagram “Possible effects of Ukraine’s participation in the creation and operation of the European rapid reaction force”.

As is clear, far less of the polled (18.9%) view Ukraine’s participation in the European rapid reaction force first and foremost as an additional economic burden for this country. Still less people (14.6%) associate



⁷ In his speech on September 23, 2001, President L.Kuchma said, “in the next decade, the issue of accession to the European Union should be raised practically”. See: <http://www.kuchma.gov.ua/main/>.



such participation with human losses, involvement in conflicts, deterioration of image (this is unlikely to point to the indifference to the lives of our servicemen).

It should be added that the majority of those polled (52.1%) believes that the cost of Ukraine's participation in peacekeeping operations of the European force should be covered by the EU. Such a position seems reasonable — economically developed European states have far greater resources than Ukraine for the maintenance of the rapid reaction force and conduct of peacekeeping operations.

Another thing strikes the eye: 43.8% of Ukrainian citizens spoke in favour of joint financing of peacekeeping operations. I.e., people many of whom are in a difficult economic situation, are ready to sacrifice money that is in no way superfluous for ensuring peace and stability in our common European home.

It is clear that the problem of our country's participation in CESDP goes beyond the framework of Ukraine-EU relations. In this context, the public perception of the geopolitical consequences of Ukraine's participation in the European rapid reaction force looks interesting, particularly regarding its relations in the NATO-Russia-EU triangle (Diagram "Possible effects of Ukraine's participation in CESDP on its relations with NATO, Russia and the EU").

The greatest share of those polled (39.9%) pointed to the positive effects of Ukraine's participation in CESDP on its contacts with the European Union (it is hard to understand however what 5.5% of respondents meant who described such effects as negative; maybe they meant Ukraine's inability to fulfill its commitments, as was sometimes the case, for instance, in relations with NATO).

The other two groups of assessments, dealing with Russia and NATO, also arouse attention: almost equally

small numbers of the polled (17.8% and 16.5%, respectively) stressed the positive effects of Ukraine's participation in CESDP on its relations with the Russian Federation and the North Atlantic Alliance.

The difference in positions as to the negative effects is more evident (such influence on relations with the Russian Federation was marked by every fourth respondent (25%), with NATO — by 18.5%). People are likely aware that military co-operation with the EU indirectly draws Ukraine closer to NATO, which objectively runs contrary to Russia's interests.

Most probably, the contradictory nature of and uncertainty in the position of Ukraine's population as to the processes taking place on the European continent are conditioned both by the great number and complexity of the problems of internal transformation of the European Union (particularly in the defence sector), and by the lack of relevant information.

However, it is precisely today that we are witnessing the process of formation of public perception of the problems that are crucial for our state: EU enlargement to Ukraine's borders and materialisation of the Common European security and defence policy.

In particular, today, one can note: a positive trend with regard to the EU rapid reaction force on the part of Ukraine's population; a somewhat excessive criticism of NATO, caused, among other factors, by foreign influence and the lack of unbiased information.

Therefore, it seems important to use as much as possible the potential of Ukraine's co-operation with NATO, in parallel with the removal of the information "vacuum" around the EU and NATO, particularly in the security domain, to ensure the stability and irreversibility of the process of European integration of our country. The support of Ukraine's population for the European path for Ukraine presents a solid foundation for this. ■