

# The Role and Position of Three Rimland States

## Ukraine, Belarus and Slovakia

Henryk Binkowski

Belarus and Ukraine are neighbours and come from the same Russian roots, their international position in the region, however, differs so much as if they were situated in different parts of the world.

### Ukraine

#### Introduction

Ukraine, gaining independence in 1991 and becoming a sovereign state, was completely unprepared for it in organisational and, first of all, intellectual aspects. It currently has problems to define the term "nation" as there is no precise answer accepted by everybody. There is a definition close to the Galitians (Western Ukraine) who describe the Ukrainian nation according to ethnic and linguistic categories and to cultural and historical heritage. There is also a Kiev concept assuming that a nation can be built on a political and territorial basis. According to Kiev, a Ukrainian is a person who lives in Ukraine, regardless of his/her ethnic roots or of the language that he/she was raised in, summing up, Ukrainians are, due to this concept, "a political nation".<sup>1</sup>

The starting position of Ukraine was incomparably worse than the Polish or the Slovakian one. The Polish People's Republic was not an entirely sovereign state but it was a real and complete one which had all necessary structures with central governing centres. Soviet Ukraine, however, expressed loyalty to the Soviet Government but it was provided merely with a part of state structures, generally with rudimentary centres or without them. Declaring independence was an act to break away from the Soviet centre, above all, from Russia, but not from a socialist political system. Therefore, during the first three years the Ukrainian leadership, reading rightly its own nation's expectations, avoided any market reforms and rather concentrated its activities on becoming independent from Russia.

The role of independence guardian is adopted most of all by new governing authorities, most often with communist roots; even if the independence guardian's particular interest is to maintain power, it has to act so that it will

---

1 Ukrainian Puzzle (P.Smoleński's interview with Jarosław Hrycak), "Gazeta Wyborcza", 19. November 1998, no 271, p. 14.

strengthen the Ukrainian state's independence, otherwise, it would lose its privileged social position.

Taking into account premises which define Ukraine's regional position, the following seem to be the most essential:<sup>2</sup>

Ukraine is the second largest state in size and the fifth, as far as population is concerned, in Europe. Therefore, its appearance on the continent's political map as a new sovereign state marks one of the most important geo-political changes in post-war Europe. The development of the situation in Ukraine and also in its closest neighbourhood may significantly influence the political climate of the whole continent.

Ukraine is situated on the edge of an instability zone which stretches from the Balkans through the Dniestr region, the south of Ukraine (Crimea), and beyond the Caucasus. It lies in the centre of a group of countries stretching from Turkey through Poland to the three Baltic states. Regional alliances and the domination of one power in this region, although in accordance with the rules of the post-war world, is possible, provided there is an active and strong participation of Ukraine.

Ukraine is Russia's largest European neighbour, separating it from Central European countries and thus pushing Russia towards Asia. Therefore, the economic and political reconstruction of Ukraine plays an important role not only in forming a new European security structure. Ukraine also conditions a dialogue of strategic significance among Central European countries and Russia and also in the area of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Ukraine lies in the line of a possible renewed division of Europe in reference to plans of NATO enlargement to the east.

## **Foreign Policy**

In the foreign policy area, the evolution of the international environment is of crucial importance for Ukrainian national interests. Its main trends are established by three simultaneously appearing phenomena:

- CIS strengthening;
- NATO and EU eastern policy;

Development of sub-regional cooperation in Central Europe and in the Black Sea region.

---

2 Goble P.A., The Ukrainian Security Trap, "The Ukrainian Quarterly" Fall 1994, p. 234; Hopes and Fears of Central and Eastern Europe: Russia, Ukraine and the Clinton Initiatives. Report of the second conference of the IEWS Strategy Groups, February 25-27, 1994, Warsaw, Poland, p. 16; Hryszczenko K. Contemporary Directions of Ukrainian Foreign Policy. "Analizy" The Centre of Eastern Studies, 8 December 1995, pp. 3-4.

Ukrainian foreign policy is based on two basic assumptions. The first one states that Ukraine has no chance to hold its independence without "a special partnership with Russia". The second assumption claims that such an acceptance cannot be reached without Western support. In practice, the point is that a move in one direction has to be correlated with a move in another direction.

The option to stay beyond any blocks was the first, and, in a way, natural proposal of foreign policy orientation for independent Ukraine. It was formed based on the experiences of the independence movement which, tending to build an independent state, neglected an alliance with one of the superpowers or neighbours. This variant was called "*Pawlytchko's Doctrine*"<sup>3</sup> and was written down in the "Declaration of State Sovereignty" of July 16, 1990 and other essential documents. This concept assumes that Ukraine should be a neutral state, should not belong to any military blocks and should be without atomic weapons. The declaration of such a political programme was aimed at quickly obtaining recognition of the country's independence by the international community and at gaining security guarantees; it was also to facilitate the influx of expected economic help from the West.

In an aspect of ideological choice, it was an orientation to build a state of parliamentary democracy, under the rule of law, and a market economy, thus based on western standards and, possibly, of greatest priority for the relations with the "western system" countries, i.e. the USA and Western Europe.

After formal recognition of Ukraine's independence, the most crucial problem for the western countries was the issue to liquidate Ukraine's atomic weapons and not its sovereignty or development. As far as nuclear potential is concerned, Ukraine was in third place, although in practice this potential was controlled by Russia. Ukraine, however, expected a completely different reaction from the Western world. It was believed that the rich West would enthusiastically welcome the birth of a new state in this region and that it would offer various forms of help and would offer Ukraine a very close cooperation. According to *Stephen Larrabee* of the RAND Corporation,<sup>4</sup> *Leonid Kravtchuk's* and his team's expectations failed because of three reasons.

**Firstly**, Ukraine's delay to return its nuclear weapons to Russia and attempts to take advantage of their possession in various negotiations had a negative influence upon the West. In return, the Western firm position was that an entire denuclearisation of Ukraine must be an initial condition for any kind of help. Therefore, Ukraine's relations with western countries remained rather cool until the moment this problem was completely overcome.

---

3 From the name of Dymytr Pavlytchko, the chairman of foreign affairs parliamentary commission in 1991 – 1994. Compare: R.Zięba: *Ukrainian Political Options (I)*, "Wojsko i Wychowanie", 1997, no 10, pp. 88-89;

4 Quoted after T.Chabiera: *Status for Ukraine*, (in:) *Poland and Ukraine in the 1990s. Bases and Platforms of Cooperation*. Selective materials from the Polish – Ukrainian Conference (25-26.11.1996), M.Całka, editor, Warsaw 1996, p.8;

**Secondly**, after the USSR's dissolution, both Europe and the USA conducted a "Russian centred policy", paying little attention to other CIS members. This was especially severe for Ukraine as the denuclearisation problem actually hindered a serious discussion on the country's strategic role, with threats to its existence resulting most of all from the lack of economic reforms necessary to be conducted in the devastated economic infrastructure.

**Thirdly**, according to *Larrabee*, Ukrainian failure to start the reforms programme weakened the possibilities of effective western financial help. At that time, the Ukrainian economy was undergoing a deepening recession which was the cause of some regional domestic conflicts. Almost towards the end of 1993, the West was taking into consideration the possibility of Ukraine's disintegration and even the loss of control over its nuclear potential which might become a threat with incalculable consequences. The beginning of Ukraine's independence was painful not only due to inner implications and decline, but also due to a cool or even hostile attitude of the environment both in the East and in the West.

The political climate towards Ukraine changed significantly in 1994. The turning point was the signing of an agreement on Ukraine's nuclear power withdrawal by the presidents of the USA, the Russian Federation (RF) and Ukraine. This agreement included an assurance that Ukraine cannot be the target of a nuclear attack. In February the Supreme Council ratified the strategic arms reduction treaty (START I), and in November the nuclear weapons non-proliferation treaty (NPT) which enabled to receive security guarantees granted by Russia, the USA and Great Britain (December 5, 1994). Also in February, Ukraine, as the first CIS country, entered the Partnership for Peace programme (PfP). In June it signed an agreement on partnership and cooperation with the European Union.

Great expectations were set on entering the PfP, especially on strengthening Ukraine's role in the region, stopping Russia's pressure tending to include Ukraine into the *Tashkent Treaty*, thus strengthening Kiev's position vis-à-vis Moscow. Simultaneously, Ukraine assessed a new NATO offer as a subsequent substitute solution. Kiev politicians, who could undertake a cooperation with NATO without any mediators, expected that their western neighbours would be more willing to cooperate with Ukraine.

### **Ukraine – Russian Federation ("Rational Partnership" Formula)**

The cultures of the societies of Ukraine and the Russian Federation have much in common: the Russian Orthodox church, common customs and traditions, similar languages, mixed marriages. In addition, 22% of Ukrainian citizens are Russian. Economically Ukraine is still strongly dependent on Russia due to oil and gas deliveries and close trade relations. It is for Russia an economic bridge connecting it with Western Europe. The loss of Ukraine means pushing Russia away from Europe with much more serious economic consequences than, for instance, cutting it off from a part of the Baltic through independent Baltic states. Hence, seven years ago, some doubts were raised if Ukraine could maintain and strengthen its independence in that situation.

Without Ukraine, as *James Sherr*,<sup>5</sup> a British politician, claims, Russia cannot regain the importance which was attached to the USSR.<sup>6</sup> Ukraine, however, according to president *Kutchma*, does not have any chance to maintain independence without "a special partnership" which cannot be accomplished without simultaneous support by Western countries.<sup>7</sup> The aim of Russia's politics was and is to include Kiev into Russian Federation integration processes and to transform the relations with Ukraine into a kind of "special relations". It is in Russia's interest to have Ukraine as its own satellite without political initiative in an international arena. In case of a large economic and political integration with Russia, Ukraine would be pushed to play only a marginal role.

It is in Kiev's interest, however, not to make Ukraine a kind of buffer between the interest of a rising superpower and the West which shows a certain limitation of interests in Ukraine's existence.

The fact that president *Kravtchuk* signed the CIS founding act was Russia's great success as it was known that the democratic opposition in Ukraine was against it stating that its membership in the Commonwealth would threaten the state's sovereignty. This was expressed in twelve provisions put forward by the Ukrainian parliament while the ratification of the *Bialowieza Agreement* (among other things, the demand to confirm the inviolability of the borders, the right to create national armed forces, and consent for only "consultations" in foreign policy – instead of the "co-ordination" agreed upon by three sides) and the declaration of December 20, 1991 presented the Ukrainian vision of CIS as a loose association.

Ukrainian leaders supporting their country's participation in the Commonwealth are careful not to take on any obligations creating supranational structures that would limit the role of member states which in conditions of great potential disproportions could lead to a Russian domination threat. Activating Ukraine's activities in the CIS economic union framework was recognised as the most rational policy.

Integration views are not only a Russian speciality. They were highly supported in Ukraine as well. An article by *Vladimir Malinkovitch*<sup>8</sup> was an example of this way of thinking. The author suggested a certain form of integration – a union of four countries (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and

---

5 J.Sherr: Ukraine, Russia, Europe, "Eurasia" 1997, no 1, p.13; A.Walewskij, M.Honczar: The Structure of Ukraine's Geo-political Interests, Warsaw, 1996, p. 27;

6 M.Bosacki: Let us Believe in Ukraine (an interview with Z.Brzeziński), "Gazeta Wyborcza", 10-11/1998, no. 238, p.10; G.Gromadzki: Ukraine Must Be Ours; "Gazeta Wyborcza" 17 April 96, no. 91, p.7;

7 J.Sherr: op.cit., p.13;

8 President's Kutchma's aides (since December 1995), the director of Ukrainian Centre for Information and Analyses for the CIS Integration created at that time. – W. Malinkowicz, The Union of Four Plus... (Russia, Ukraine, Bielorrussia and Kazakhstan May Create Something New), "Literaturnaja gazeta" 20 March 1996, no. 12;

Kazakhstan) which used to be the core of the USSR and currently are the core of the CIS. According to him, public feeling in the republic and the necessity to reconstruct a significant part of former links between the former republics and the Russian Federation favour integration plans.

The questions of Crimea, Sevastopol and the Black Sea Fleet which were the basic obstacle in regulating Russian – Ukrainian relations were solved after *Yeltsin's* recovery. On May 28, 1997 the prime ministers of Russia and Ukraine signed all documents concerning the final division of the Black Sea Fleet, the status of Sevastopol and the stationing of Russian vessels there. Due to these documents Russia will lease the military port in Sevastopol for 20 years. The agreement provides that after this time the lease can be prolonged for 5 more years. Russia, however, had to agree that Sevastopol, so far the main Black Sea Fleet base, would *de iure* belong to Ukraine.<sup>9</sup>

Eventually, after years of negotiations, quarrels and mutual accusations, the presidents of Russia and Ukraine could sign the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership on May 31, 1997.<sup>10</sup> This project was finally negotiated in February 1995 and not a comma was changed. It was recognised in Moscow that continuing the policy of threats and tensions towards Kiev did not have any sense because as a consequence Ukraine was more and more approaching NATO and its relations with Moscow were becoming cooler.

In the Treaty<sup>11</sup> Russia recognised Ukraine as a partner possessing equal rights and promised not to treat Kiev as its former colony. According to both presidents all matters of argument were resolved in the agreements signed by the two prime ministers. In a historic perspective, if the treaty is really introduced in practice, this is a correct assessment. Ukraine gained an indisputable confirmation of its rights with regard to Crimea and Sevastopol and the entire infrastructure leased by its big neighbour. Taking advantage of the opportunity, *Yeltsin* declared in Kiev a turn in Russian foreign policy. "I want", he said, "everybody to be aware that Ukraine is the most important priority of all Russian priorities".

What made the president of the Russian Federation finalise the decision which had been postponed since 1995? I suppose that *Yeltsin* could not allow signing the Ukrainian Charter with NATO to precede Russia's, at least formal, definition of its relations with Ukraine, its largest western neighbour and its key to Europe. *Yeltsin's* decision illustrates a minority's viewpoint. Most Russian politicians and Russians thought that Sevastopol was not to be returned to Ukraine by any means.

---

9 See: P.Jendroszczyk: Russian Base in Sevastopol; "Rzeczpospolita" 30.05.1997, no 124, p.7; C.Rudziński: Black Sea Units: "Polska Zbrojna" 1997, no 24, pp. 34-36;

10 A.M.Zaucha: Friendship Agreement: "Gazeta Wyborcza" 2 June 1997, no. 126, p.16; C.Rudziński: op.cit., p.34;

11 Text in: "Dokumenty" OSW, 9 June 1997;

This is also a political success of Kiev. Neither the Black Sea nor the Charter with NATO could be the most essential point. Ukraine's main point is its sovereignty. Therefore, a modest agreement on port equipment lease is more important for Ukraine than any agreements or charters. It means, though, that Russia formally recognises Ukrainian ownership of Sevastopol, resigns from territorial claims towards Ukraine and is ready to agree, at least formally, with Ukraine's sovereignty, i.e. with a stable geo-political order in this region of Europe.

Since 1997, a great increase in mutual relations has been taking place<sup>12</sup> which was proved by signing an agreement of economic cooperation up to 2007 in Moscow on February 27, 1998.<sup>13</sup>

All agreements signed between Russia and Ukraine are a positive phenomenon from the viewpoint of the security of this region's countries, including Poland. An attempt to settle neighbourly relations on legal principles creates the basis to solve numerous Russian – Ukrainian problems with political measures.

The Ukrainian – Russian model declared by Kiev can be presented in the following way:

- intensive, mutually profitable economic, financial and humanitarian cooperation;
- excluding participation in CIS military-political structures;
- cautious political cooperation based on Ukrainian national interests.

This model can be called "a rational partnership" doctrine in which Ukraine's economic interests dominate.

### **Relations with the United States**

Until 1992, the Western strategy did not stipulate supporting the independence tendencies of separate republics<sup>14</sup> and the US policy assumptions towards Ukraine were defined by the American strategy for the entire area of the former USSR, Russia in particular. Signing an agreement in January 1994 on withdrawing nuclear weapons from Ukraine opened the way for closer contacts and changed Washington's policy towards Kiev.

---

12 P.Je., Jelctsin Supports Kutchma, "Rzeczpospolita" 31 January-1 February 1998, no. 26, p.4; P.Kościński: Turning Despite a Direction Indicator, "Rzeczpospolita" 31 January -1 February 1998, no. 26, p.4

13 Text review: President Kutchma's visit in Moscow (ed. H.Malon, R.Seniuch): Bulletin MON DBM February '98 no 2, pp. 8-10; S.P., The Hardest Is Behind Us, "Rzeczpospolita", 28 February -1 March 1998, no. 50, p.4;

14 See: S.Rybarczyk: Russia's New Rival. Ukraine's Foreign Policy 1991-1995; "Więź" 1996, no. 10, pp. 55-72;

In July 1994, *Leonid Kutchma* was chosen new president. In his inauguration speech he declared a turn towards greater pragmatism in Ukraine's domestic and foreign policy. A few months after the election he presented a concise programme of economic reforms which changed the positive attitude of the West towards Ukraine even more and resulted in working out significant help measures. According to American proposals, the ties between the USA and Ukraine were to be based on four pillars:<sup>15</sup> strong political ties, Washington's mediations in Russian – Ukrainian quarrels, developing direct military cooperation and technical help. Thus Ukraine left political isolation in the international arena. American political support caused the change of Ukrainian relations both with Russia, with NATO countries and with the group of the richest countries in the world (G 7).

In their contacts with Ukraine the Americans recognised the actions aimed at strengthening its sovereignty and at preparing the ground for a future long-lasting and many-sided cooperation with Kiev as the most important ones.<sup>16</sup>

Signing the American Ukrainian Charter on Partnership, Friendship and Cooperation on November 22, 1994 was a high rank event in American – Ukrainian partnership. The parties confirmed the will to establish mutual relations based on a wide and firm partnership, including a strategic one. The sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine was recognised as the foundation of the partnership. The cooperation was to be based on many-sided cooperation including politics, economy, security, culture and environmental protection.<sup>17</sup>

Announcing a new American – Ukrainian partnership in 1994 essentially changed Ukraine's position in the interests and priorities hierarchy of American foreign policy and in building stable European concepts. Most of all, Ukraine gained the stabilising role in European relations, which had so far been assigned to Russia. Russia ceased to be the only democratic order guarantee in the post-Soviet area and the American administration began to condition the success of Russian reforms on Ukrainian political and economic transformation.

The Washington administration recognised Ukraine's key importance and independent role in Europe. This was expressed in the conviction that a reformed and independent Ukraine may serve as an example for Russian democracy, may protect CIS against changing it into a political-economic

---

15 McCurdy D., The evolving US Policy toward Ukraine. "SAIS Review", Winter-Spring 1994, p.167;

16 Brzeziński I. J., New Partnership of America and Ukraine, "Eurazja", 1995, no. 1, pp. 35-37;

17 See: "The Ukrainian Quarterly", Spring 1994, s. 82-84; Hryszczyński K. Contemporary Directions of Ukrainian Foreign Policy. "Analyses" of the Eastern Studies Centre, 8 December 1995; Stachura .J. American Policy Towards Ukraine..., pp.111-112; "Rzeczpospolita", 2.04.1996;

alliance controlled by Moscow and may, in this way, stabilise the eastern European reality.<sup>18</sup>

In October 1996 the American Deputy Secretary of State, *Strobe Talbot*, summed up the US policy towards Ukraine stating its place in an American concept of a stable, democratic Europe. Firstly, he underlined that maintaining an independent and secure Ukraine lies in the United States' own national interest. Secondly, he paid attention to Ukraine's potential, stressing this country's key role in Europe. Thirdly, *Talbott* recognised the significance of Ukrainian reforms for all of Europe and the "widely understood transatlantic community", of which the United States is a part. Fourthly, he stressed the importance of Ukrainian security politics, particularly in connection with Kiev's decision in the nuclear weapons issue.

- Ukraine appears as a stabilising factor in three areas:<sup>19</sup>
- as a key to Russian reforms;
- as a guarantee of a harmonious cooperation in the region:
- as a foundation and stimulus of development of a set-back cooperation in the Black Sea region and on the north-south line.

At the same time the conviction has been strengthened in American foreign policy that any correction or reconstruction of American – Russian relations is not possible without taking Ukraine's importance for European security into consideration. All analyses of relations between Russia and the United States refer also to American – Ukrainian relations.<sup>20</sup>

## **Ukraine and NATO**

For a certain time Kiev held a reserved position towards the plans of NATO enlargement to the east. The Ukrainian Minister of Defence at that time, *Shmarov*, raised fears concerning the role of a buffer zone which would be assigned to Ukraine and other central and eastern European countries.<sup>21</sup> In April 1995 President *Kutchma* persuaded the Czech Republic not to rush in this direction, so that a whole European security system could be built and that the Old Continent would not be divided into two opposite blocks.<sup>22</sup> Undoubtedly he was then favouring the idea of changing the alliance from a common defence system into a common security system with Russia's and

---

18 Mroz J.E., Pavlik O., Ukraine: Europe's Linchpin, "Foreign Affairs", May-June 1996, p. 52-54;

19 Comp. Koźmiński A.Z., Kozakiewicz J.: Polish – Ukrainian Relations. Report, Warsaw 1997, p. 9-18;

20 See e.g.. "USDSD", January – February 1998, p.17;

21 O.Pavliuk: Ukraine and Regional Cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe, "Security Dialogue", 1997, vol.28, no. 3, p.353;

22 G.Gromadzki: Looking for the World's Umbilicus; "Gazeta Wyborcza" 30 May 95, no. 124, p.9;

Ukraine's participation. *Bill Clinton's* visit in Kiev in May 1995 had a crucial importance in questioning this philosophy of neutrality. During the talk with the American president, *Kutchma* for the first time supported an "evolutionary" NATO enlargement to the east. He admitted that the Alliance is a factor which stabilises the situation in Europe, understanding that further insistence on a neutrality policy would leave Ukraine alienated between Russia and the West.<sup>23</sup> In the same month, while delivering a speech in a meeting held at PfP exercises, the president claimed that NATO enlargement was taking place and that the process could not be stopped.<sup>24</sup> This statement was understood as Ukraine's agreement to NATO enlargement, however, it was not a complete agreement.

Kiev's recognition for NATO enlargement was hastened by Boris Yeltsin's dashing statements on the necessity to build a strong military block consisting of the countries created after the USSR's dissolution, which for the Ukrainians sounded like a threat to increase Russian pressures on Ukraine.

Ukraine joined the Partnership for Peace very quickly and willingly (September 16, 1995) seeing in this American idea a possibility to maintain the present situation in this part of Europe and thus postponing Poland's, the Czech Republic's and Hungary's entry into NATO. Kiev received a special status in the PfP programme which so far had been only Russia's privilege. It seems to be a kind of bonus for Kiev that it does not protest against NATO enlargement to the east and that it appreciates the Alliance's contribution in strengthening stability and security in Europe.

At the beginning of 1996 Ukrainian politicians clearly stopped opposing NATO enlargement. A conviction started to dominate in the president's and government representatives' appearances that selective countries have the right to integrate with economic and political structures of their choice, including NATO. It seems, however, that it was their desire that this process was to have a long-lasting character. Ukraine would certainly like to use that time to strengthen its position vis-à-vis Russia. Kiev did not exclude joining NATO in the future. This could be proved by declarations stating that NATO enlargement should be an open process for all countries. These suppositions were confirmed by President *Kutchma* during his talk with NATO Secretary General *Javier Solana* in 1996.<sup>25</sup>

This direction of Kiev's political evolution was in agreement with NATO leadership viewpoints.<sup>26</sup>

It is believed that Ukraine showing caution in defining its position towards NATO was afraid, first of all, of Russia's pressure. In fact, Kiev took into

---

23 Ibidem;

24 "Siegodnia" 25 May 1995 – quot.: A.Moszes: Geopoliticeskije iskania Kijewa (w:) "Pro et Contra", wiesna 1998, vol..3, no. 2, p.102;

25 Quoted after: A.Zaucha: Towards NATO or into NATO; "Gazeta Wyborcza" 16 April 96, p.7;

26 Ibidem;

consideration a greater number of factors, namely the risk that it would become a buffer between opposite blocks, the danger of countries gaining NATO membership which, according to Ukraine, had territorial claims (mostly Poland and Romania), the escalation of Russian pressures and, in the further perspective, the issue that the USA, Russia and central and eastern European countries would reach an agreement at the cost of Kiev's interests.<sup>27</sup>

Kiev attempts to counteract this inconvenient political situation in two ways:

Kiev declared that it wants to gradually integrate with western security structures (stating at the same time that this cannot be achieved in the short run);<sup>28</sup>

Kiev suggested creating a non-nuclear zone in Central Europe which would include Ukraine, Belarus, the *Vyshegrad Group* countries, the Baltic states, Moldavia, Bulgaria, Romania, Sweden, Finland and the Kaliningrad District.

The non-nuclear zone initiative was rather a political activity demonstration and the will to draw NATO's attention to Kiev than a suggestion in principle. When NATO stated that it was not going to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of its new members, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, *H. Udovenko*, hastily talked about "a great victory of Ukrainian diplomacy" (although it was known that the statement did not have a legal basis).<sup>29</sup> It is possible, however, that the idea of the Ukrainian suggestion consisted in limiting the possibility of Russia's acute response on NATO enlargement.<sup>30</sup>

Soon after that, president *Kutchma* confirmed again that Kiev did not oppose NATO enlargement but explicitly did not agree to a hypothetical possibility to deploy NATO nuclear weapons on future members' territories.<sup>31</sup>

Apart from these reservations, Ukraine sees NATO as the only functioning security system in Europe and the fact that central European countries have a chance to enter Euro-Atlantic structures prevented them from a "Yugoslavian" catastrophe.

Ukraine's more decisive approach to Euro-Atlantic structures, which was expressed by signing the NATO – Ukraine Charter in Madrid on July 9, 1997, hastened the appearance of the Belarus and Russia Union. The NATO

---

27 A.Szewcow, A.Popow: Problemy jewropiejskiej bezopastnosti, (in:) Ukraina: problemy bezopastnosti. Naucznyje doklady Moskowskogo Centra Karnegi. Wypusk 12, Moscow 1996, pp. 70, 78-79;

28 Interview with Kutchma, "Zierkało niedieli", 23 March 1996;

29 "Siegodnia" 29 January 1997 – quot.: A.Moszes: Geopoliticzeskije iskania Kijewa (in:) "Pro et Contra", wiesna 1998, vol. 3, no. 2, p.103;

30 See: A.Szewcow, A.Popow: Problemy jewropiejskiej bezopasnosti: perspiektiwjy bezjadiernoj zony w Centralnoj i Wostocznoj Jewropie (in:) Ukraina: problemy bezopasnosti. Pod red. I.Kobrinskoj o Sz.Garnieta, Moskow 1996, pp. 49-84;

31 Germans See Moscow and Kiev; "Gazeta Wyborcza", 5 September 1996, no 207,p.9;

Secretary General, Solana, stressed that the decision to sign the Charter resulted from the Alliance member states' conviction of Ukraine's crucial importance for European security.<sup>32</sup> In the Charter the principles were defined in accordance with international law on which the bilateral cooperation of the signatories would be based and the two partners' areas of consultations and cooperation were stated.

The NATO – Ukraine Charter facilitates achieving three aims of Ukraine. **Firstly**, it causes that the Ukrainian state's independence is perceived as a political fact (not merely a legal one) of serious consequences for the whole continent. **Secondly**, it changes Kiev's position in the relations with Russia. **Thirdly**, it ensures a real influence on shaping the "European security architecture".

In 1997, however, signing an agreement with Russia on the division of the Black Sea Fleet,<sup>33</sup> due to which Russian troops will be stationed in Ukraine for at least twenty years, withdrew for that time the problem of Ukraine joining NATO. President *Kutchma* confirmed this during *Solana's* visit in Kiev in July 1998. "We want", he said, "strengthening the cooperation with NATO, although currently we cannot speak about the membership in the Alliance. We are also not against NATO enlargement onto the East".<sup>34</sup>

Summing up, we can say that Ukraine's position towards NATO enlargement is influenced by the following factors:

Ukrainian foreign policy possesses a limited manoeuvre area due to Russia's firm position towards Ukraine.

It is unclear how enlarging the Alliance responsibility zone to the borders of Ukraine will influence Ukraine's security.

An important factor influencing Kiev's position is the fact that the possibility to become a full member of an effective security system such as NATO remains a very distant perspective for Ukraine.

Ukrainian society cannot not accept a sovereign tendency of other states to strengthen their own security and in this way entire Central Europe.

Enlarging the NATO responsibility zone is not only a military but also a political and historical move because it favours European integration.

Taking into account Poland's security, defining a strategic perspective of Ukraine approaching NATO becomes a successive positive signal coming from its strategic partner in the east. It proves Kiev's will to make Ukraine

---

32 P.Kościński: Towards the Right Way, "Rzeczpospolita" 10 July 1998, no. 160, p.6;

33 S.P., The Most Difficult Is Behind Us, "Rzeczpospolita", 28 February –1 March 1998, no. 50, p.4;

34 P.Kościński: How to Avoid a Grey Zone, "Rzeczpospolita", 23 July 1998, no. 171;

compatible in cooperation with the central European states who are the first to become members of the North Atlantic Alliance.

### **Cooperation with Poland**

The lots of Ukraine and the Ukrainians are interwoven with ours to an incomparably greater degree than the lots of any other territory or nation.

Events from the Second World War and the "*Vistula*" action influenced mutual relations strongest.<sup>35</sup> On both sides of the borders there are still prejudices and stereotypes present to the mind, as well as tendencies to transfer onto the other side real and unreal faults and mistakes from common history. On the other hand, however, it was Poland which for years provided Ukraine with examples of how to fight the Soviet system and today it serves as an example of how to leave it.

The most essential matter is that in both countries there are no influential and significant political forces opposing cooperation. Poland was the first country to recognise Ukraine's independence and the mutual relations have been developing quite well since the beginning.

On May 18, 1992, the Treaty on Good Neighbourhood, Friendly Relations and Cooperation was signed and many other agreements followed.<sup>36</sup> In 1993 president *Lech Wałęsa* paid a visit to Kiev, during which a concept of a "Strategic Partnership of Poland and Ukraine" appeared.<sup>37</sup> After this euphoria, a period of stagnation came.<sup>38</sup> The directions and aims of both countries' foreign policy temporarily did not match. Ukraine perceived very negatively a Polish – Russian agreement on building a pipeline from Siberia to western Europe and even treated it as treason. The pipeline is to cross Belarus in a situation when pipelines from Russia crossing Ukraine are a very important bargaining card in its relations with Moscow.

The change in Polish – Ukrainian relations began to appear in the middle of 1995. It was the USA encouraging us to a closer cooperation with Ukraine and Kiev signing a special programme of cooperation with NATO.<sup>39</sup> In July 1995 President *Kutchna* speaking about the state's policy in central Europe stressed that relations with Poland are the most important for Ukraine in this region and that Polish significance for the "western direction" can be compared with

---

35 President Kwaśniewski discussed it (in:) Let Europe Discover Ukraine (A.Kwaśniewski interviewed by W.Osadczyk), "Gazeta Wyborcza", 22 January 1997, no. 18, p.16;

36 See.: W.Gil: Poland's Relations with Ukraine (in:) Poland and Its New Neighbours (1989-1993), Poznań – Toruń 1994, pp.107-108;

37 See: B.Osadczyk: With Wałęsa in Ukraine, "Kultura" (Paris), 1993, no. 7-8, pp.112-113; W.Gil. N.Gil: Poland's Relations with Ukraine in 1989-1993, Toruń – Poznań 1994, pp.31-32; G.Gromadzki: Attention. Ukraine!, "Gazeta Wyborcza" , 22 November 95, p.9;

38 G.Gromadzki: Attention, Ukraine!, "Gazeta Wyborcza" , 22 November -95, p.9;

39 Ibidem;

the importance that Russia has for Ukraine for the "the eastern direction".<sup>40</sup> This way of thinking and transforming it into a strategic thought consolidated after 1996.

A vivid sign of strengthening the above mentioned tendency in Polish – Ukrainian relations was a common declaration of the presidents of Poland and Ukraine, *A. Kwaśniewski* and *L. Kuchma* signed on June 25, 1996 in Warsaw.<sup>41</sup> It was written in it that the existence of independent Ukraine was a factor favouring the consolidation of Polish independence, while similarly, the existence of sovereign Poland favours strengthening the independence of Ukraine. The Polish Republic and Ukraine tend to work for the idea of a common Europe and the building of a new European security structure in which both countries will have a place according to their aspirations and needs. In the declaration the tendency of both countries to develop a strategic partnership was confirmed; the idea of this partnership, according to president *Kwaśniewski*, consists in mutual help "to enter European structures".<sup>42</sup> A certain complement and a good prognosis for the future is undoubtedly a Polish – Ukrainian declaration on reconciliation which Presidents *Kwaśniewski* and *Kuchma* signed on May 21, 1997 in Kiev. But its message is addressed to future generations who will live in a common Europe without prejudices and mistrust. This declaration was thought to close the past and open the door to the future.<sup>43</sup>

The effects of the achievements in Polish – Ukrainian relations so far are significant. It is not an exaggeration to say that from the times of Presidents *Wałęsa* and *Kravtchuk* up till now a great rapprochement has taken place which can be only compared to the French – German rapprochement.

An Ukrainian – Polish team would be an essential factor not only in central Europe but in the entire continent's scale, according to *Z. Brzeziński*. In his opinion "Poland and Ukraine are two main regions separating Germany and Russia, two nations that have played a historic role in European geo-politics. Political-economic collapse of Poland and Ukraine may mean a geo-political vacuum encouraging both Germany and Russia to interfere there. A close cooperation, however, which will strengthen Polish and Ukrainian political existence and economic prosperity would free Germany and Russia from temptations which used to favour their ambitions in Eastern Europe".<sup>44</sup>

---

40 G.Gromadzki; Ukraine Is Looking West; "Gazeta Wyborcza" , 25 July 95, no. 171, p.9;

41 Ukraine's President Leonid Kuchma's Visit in Warsaw, "Wiadomości" OSW, 26 June 1996, no. 119, pp. 1-2;

42 Let Europe Discover Ukraine (A.Kwaśniewski interviewed by W.Osadczyk), "Gazeta Wyborcza", 22 January 1997, no. 18, p.16;

43 Joint declaration of the presidents of Poland and Ukraine, "Biuletyn Ukraiński" 1996, no. 3, pp.17-19; J.Walczak: With Will and Word, "Polityka" 1997, no. 22, p.17;

44 Quoted after: A.Walewskij, M.Honczar: Structure of Ukrainian Geo-political Interests, Warsaw 1996, p.45;

It seems that in relations with Kiev we should take an example from Germany and its policy towards us. The fact that Germany wants us to join NATO and the European Union results from "healthy selfishness". German politicians think that their country should not be a rimland country of European security and prosperity. Taking into consideration our integration with Europe, we have to think in the same way and be a strong advocate of Ukraine's rapprochement with the West.

Approaching the West, the road to which crosses also Poland, is for Ukraine a chance to maintain independence. The Ukrainian people do not have a great choice. If they think seriously about joining the West, they have to have good relations with us. Obviously there are differences of opinions between us. The most vivid example is currently the matter of Poland entering NATO. Ukrainian reasons of state differ in this matter. Kiev wants to have the closest possible cooperation with the Alliance but it realises that currently it can only dream of entering it.<sup>45</sup> The fear is present among our neighbours that after Poland's entry into NATO Ukraine will remain alienated between the Euro-Atlantic Alliance and Russia and will face stronger pressures from Moscow. Hence, for instance, the decisive Ukrainian reaction to a purely theoretical nuclear weapons deployment in Hungary and in Poland. This response, similar to the Russian viewpoint in this matter, does not mean a Russian – Ukrainian rapprochement.

The effects of two-sided politics (Russia and the West) are undoubted. The authorities in Kiev have managed to gain recognition and trust among western countries which influences Russia's attitude.<sup>46</sup>

During the short time of independence, Ukraine became a crucial element of the geo-strategic game in Europe. In spite of economic difficulties, disturbances in domestic policy and disputes with Russia concerning territorial and prestigious matters, Ukraine managed to take advantage of resuming the second largest nuclear potential in order to draw the western European superpowers' attention. It is a member of the Council of Europe and the OSCE, in 1996 it was admitted to ISE, it signed the PfP Programme, conducted relations with NATO on a level of deep and enlarged cooperation, tends to gain the status of an associate member of the WEU. The European Union recognised Ukraine as a country with a "transitional economy" of a big potential in the area of new technologies.

---

45 Russian troops are stationed in Ukraine (for at least 19 more years), therefore Ukraine will not be able to enter NATO for these 20 years. Similarly, the EU is not willing to present even an association agreement to Ukraine. The CEFTA will probably cease to exist after its members join the EU;

46 J.Sherr: op.cit., pp.10-21;

# Belarus

## Introduction

The Belarus people never experienced the great enthusiasm so characteristic for instance for Ukraine and the Baltic states connected with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. They did not fight for independence like the Ukrainians and Belarus did not belong to the initiators of transformations in the USSR. Gaining independence was a consequence of *Gorbachev's perestroika*. Like other USSR republics, the Parliament (the Supreme Council) proclaimed the Declaration of Sovereignty (July 27, 1990). But this was done not because Belarus desired freedom but because it was afraid of a democratic revolution like in Moscow where the fortresses of the communist party were defeated because of democrats' strikes. Separating formally from the Soviet state centre, the Belarus communists, having a majority in parliament, maintained their state of possession and power. Following other republics Belarus declared independence on August 25, 1991.

The fact that 80 % of referendum participants supported maintaining the USSR (March 17, 1991) shows the Belarus people's attitude towards independence. Based on this fact it can be seen how the opinions of the majority of the population differed from the Belarus governing communists. Soon a feeling of nostalgia towards the USSR appeared. It was magnified by at first gradual, then rapid decline of the citizens' social status of this young country. In consequence, they started to recognise gaining independence as the source of all negative phenomena.

Belarus is a poor country, without any natural resources, entirely dependent on Russia in energy and fuel supplies. In Soviet times every second employed person in industry worked for the needs of factories and plants located in other parts of the USSR.

The lack of economic independence determined from the beginning the direction of the Belarus authorities which by all means tried to maintain the ties with the former USSR as much as possible. This policy was a guideline for the political governing elite which secured its possessions and did not conduct market economy reforms which could only limit this state.

A similar situation took place as far as choosing a geo-political option is concerned. Initially Belarus defined itself as a state "tending to neutrality" (written in the Declaration of the State Sovereignty of 1990). This concept, however, failed.<sup>47</sup>

The neutrality of the state was seriously questioned at the beginning of 1993 when joining the CIS Treaty on Common Security (*Tashkent Treaty*) was discussed. After electing *Alexander Lukashenko* president (1994), the majority of the Supreme Council, consisting of communists and agrarians coming from *kolhos* and *sovhoz* collective farms, recognised the neutrality concept as

---

47 C.Goliński: The End of Neutrality?, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 7 April 1995, no. 82, p.7;

completely inadequate for the political reality of Belarus. The participation in integrated structures of the common security treaty of the CIS countries and the realisation of the Agreement on establishing an Alliance with Russia, in practice, ceased the idea of the state's neutrality.

Belarus not only politically but also economically and mentally is deeply rooted in socialism. No essential structural reforms have been conducted so far in the Belarus economy. There is a low level of privatisation, a high degree of central governing, unstable legal acts, a constant and significant decrease of investments, and a very low level of liberalisation. Taking into consideration economic indices, especially in reference to reforms carried out, Belarus seems to be doing worse than Russia. Taking Belarus out of the economic crisis will be extremely expensive in the future.

These factors in connection with foreign policy effects define Belarus's position in the region and in European politics.

As it results from President *Lukashenko's* and other politicians' statements, Belarus's politics should have the following characteristics: "balance and pragmatic character of relations with other states".<sup>48</sup> This is only wishful thinking because in order to conduct such politics many partners and substantial political independence are needed. In reality, Belarus attempts to build up its international position giving priority to the relations with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Russia.

### **Commonwealth of Independent States**

According to the Belarus concept, the CIS suits vital interests of the state. The future of the Commonwealth consists in deepening economic integration, creating a common economic and legal space, and coordinating political actions based on mutual recognition of the member states' rights and interests.

The CIS, however, faces a crisis which can question its development perspectives. Belarus leadership seriously concerned with the CIS future works out projects to reform the Commonwealth. In his appearance at a conference commemorating "Six Years of Commonwealth" (Minsk, 2 – 4 March, 1998), Lukashenko regretted that the CIS was not able to reverse or at least soften the "fatal consequences" of the USSR's collapse. According to him, the Commonwealth which was created to maintain long ties was transformed into an instrument of "a civilised divorce" and eventually to break up these ties. The task of the CIS is to reach unification.<sup>49</sup>

---

48 Wnieszniąja politika naszej strony nosit pragmaticzeskij charaktier. "Sovetskaja Belorussija", 27 February 1997; Latipov's Success: Ambassadors Return to Bielorussia, "Tydzień na Wschodzie" (OSW Special Bulletin), 14 January 1999, no. 3, p.3;

49 Międzynarodnaja konferencija "Szesť let Sodružestwa: problemy i perspektiwy", 2-4 March 1998, Minsk 1998, p.5;

Thus Minsk sees the CIS as an instrument which could help to reconstruct a union country taking the USSR as an example.<sup>50</sup> In *Lukashenko's* opinion, the many years of a common state allowed to gain "precious experience of life organisation in a deeply integrated state and community" and this cannot be wasted.

### **Belarus versus Russia**

The framework of *Lukashenko's* policy towards Russia was formed earlier. Both Prime Minister *Kiebitch* and *Lukashenko* were aware of a common acceptance of the rapprochement with Russia. In the 1994 election campaign they both fought to gain the same electorate bidding who would link Minsk with Moscow more strongly. In the public opinion feeling, such a union guaranteed an economic stabilisation.

*Lukashenko* since the beginning of his term of office did not conceal tendencies to join Russia even paying the price of Belarus's sovereignty. He acted in a consistent way: he changed the state's coat of arms, flag, national anthem, and he reintroduced Russian as an official language. He changed the constitution which gives him unlimited power. On April 2, 1996 he signed an agreement on integration (the Union of Belarus and Russia came into being). He pacified the opposition, including the parliamentary opposition, he dissolved the parliament and promised the Belarus people wealthy living conditions.

The newest act of this integration agreement series was *Lukashenko's* and *Yeltsin's* declaration, signed on December 25, 1998 stipulating the creation of a new union state.<sup>51</sup> The records of former agreements mostly did not come in practice. *Lukashenko* ensures that this time it will be different. The president made a commitment that till the middle of the year an agreement on unification into a union state will have been worked out and "given to the nation's consultations". Also, the government and supranational administration bodies will be created. There will be a single currency and one budget, one foreign and defence policy, one common security system. By the end of the year appropriate changes in law will have been introduced.

It cannot be excluded that the declaration on integration is an escape into the future. *Lukashenko* will want to accelerate this process hoping that in this way he will be able to maintain power. The declaration may become a subsequently meaningless document in the president's rich files. *Lukashenko's* determination, however, proves the fact that just a month after signing the above mentioned declaration on a Parliamentary Session of the Union of Belarus and Russia, he accused "defined forces" in Russia, in the Russian media and in western institutions (including the International Monetary Fund)

---

50 A.Pečerskij: Nowaja rol SNG dla staroj integracionnoj piesy, "Bielaruskaja Gazieta", 9 March 1998;

51 P.Jendroszczyk: More Questions than Answers, "Rzeczpospolita", 30 December 1998, no. 304, p. 4; J.Wilczak: The Third Wedding, "Polityka", 1999, no. 2, p.16;

of actions which cause a slowing down of the pace of integration and of purposefully causing the economic crisis in Russia, neglecting the union with the brotherly Slavic nation.<sup>52</sup>

Russian interest in Belarus is dictated first of all by geo-political and strategic factors (including strategic-military ones). Belarus shuts off Russia from a direct access to central Europe (not taking into consideration the Kaliningrad District). Currently Russia's foreign trade with Europe is mostly conducted through Belarus's territory. Moscow develops systematically military ties connecting it with Belarus and it achieved significant effects. In the period of December 1997 to January 1998 the Treaty of Military Cooperation and Agreement on Common Ensuring Regional Security in the Military Area were signed, also the Concept of Common Defence Policy of Belarus and Russia was accepted. In these documents there are statements on creating a common defence space, joint military potentials, common orders in the defence industry, agreeing on plans concerning research and construction works.

In spite of impressive medial integration acts and imparting dynamism of cooperation in selective areas of the state's activity, Russia delays the decision of Belarus joining. It grades this process (certainly in case of undertaking such a decision, attempts will be made to transfer its costs to the Belarus side and steps will be taken to introduce reforms in the state which will be accompanied by the influx of Russian capital taking over the most attractive part of the republic's economy). Simply speaking, it can be said that the poorer the Belarus people are, the more of them want to give in to Russia and the stronger Russian resistance grows to include them entirely.

The major obstacle making the unification into one state difficult and sometimes even impossible is a different level of economic reforms in Belarus and Russia. Currently these economic systems do not match and in some cases the directions of economy elements are opposite.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, Russia is the only state which would really influence the situation in Belarus. This results from very close ties of the Belarus economy to the Russian one.

### **Relations with the West**

The relations of Belarus with western organisations and superpowers have entered a hard time. The difficulties began in the mid-nineties but were severely acute after the 1996 referendum when amendments and appendices to the constitution giving the president unlimited power were accepted. The West is concerned with not respecting human rights in Belarus and also it does not recognise the constitutional referendum's results. *Lukashenko's* response is as

---

52 S.P.: Too Slow March to a New State, "Rzeczpospolita", 29 January 1999, no. 18, p.6;

53 A.Rozanov: Vneš naja politika Belorussii: predstavlenija i realnosti, "Pro et Contra", vol. 3, no. 2, p. 72;

follows: the most important human right is the right to work and earn a living and that he received his powers in general public elections.<sup>54</sup>

The West adopted a decisive, rigorous attitude towards Minsk. Problems have arisen in cooperation with the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe, OSCE and NATO.

The Council of Europe (CE) refused recognising the situation in the Republic of Belarus in accordance with law stating that the constitution of 1994 remains the only legal basis and the parliament elected according to this constitution is the legislative body operating on legal grounds. The Council of Europe took away a status of a special guest from Belarus and called upon the European Union members to boycott Minsk.<sup>55</sup> In September the EU acted according to that call and all fifteen countries decided to suspend all political relations with the Minsk authorities. Rudimentary contacts are to be carried out by diplomats of countries who hold rotary leadership in this organisation. The European Union experts have also been withdrawn, the relief programme TACIS and the process to implement a bilateral trade agreement have also been suspended. However, there is no economic blockade as, in practice, a trade exchange does not exist.<sup>56</sup>

Also the relations with the OSCE are not the best. The OSCE Parliamentary Session in Copenhagen in July 1997 decided to grant the right to represent Belarus to this country's unofficial delegation representing the parliament elected in a democratic way, dissolved by president *Lukashenko* in 1996 but still recognised by the OSCE. At the beginning of 1998 a certain agreement was reached and an OSCE post was opened in Minsk instead of the previously planned mission. Minsk opposed opening the mission as it would make "peaceful and stable Belarus" equal to the states beyond the Caucasus and to former Yugoslavia.<sup>57</sup>

*Lukashenko* considers the present conflict in categories of a clashing of the opposition favouring the west with the Belarus nation favouring the Russian president and supporting him. Thus, all the time he imposes on the society a hostile attitude towards the West, its way of life, political system, western civilisation in general. The president says directly: "Western values have nothing in common with the Belarus people's mentality". "I will not lead my

---

54 C.Goliński: Sentenced for the President, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 8 December 1997, no. 285, p.10;

55 The European Union signed the Accord on Partnership and Cooperation with Belarus on 6 March 1995. It stipulates for political dialogue, basing trade on the highest privilege clause, and probable holding talks on free trade zone in 1998. (See: "Wiadomości" OSW, 7 March 1995, pp.6-7;

56 You Have Made a Mistake, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 15.01.1997, p.8; B.Węglarczyk" Sanctions on Bielorrussia, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 13-14 September 1997, no. 214, p.6; A.Rozanov: Vneš naja politika Belorussii: predstavlenija i realnosti, "Pro et Contra", vol. 3, no. 2, p. 74;

57 OSCE – BIELORUSSIA: "Gazeta Wyborcza", 8 July 1998, no. 158. p.7, "Rzeczpospolita", 8 July 1998, no. 158. p.5; C.Goliński: Politycznych niet, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 28 February – 1 March 1998, no. 50, p.8; Bronisław Geremek: "My chotim, czto by Bielaruś otkazałas' ot samoizolacii, "Beloruskaja Delovaja Gazeta", 26 February 1998;

nation to follow the civilised world". The picture of the West is perceived in demon categories – cunning and materialistic Western plots against the East, including Belarus. The possibility for NATO to approach Belarus' borders is seen in these categories.

## **Relation to NATO**

Belarus appears in the role as the strongest opponent of NATO enlargement to the east and, taking into consideration anti-NATO rhetoric, it even surpasses Russia.

Belarus leaders did not think it was right, following Russia's and Ukraine's example, to make an appropriate manoeuvre and undertake constructive steps in order to change its relations with the Alliance. When in May *Yeltsin* and *Solana* signed the Russia – NATO Charter in Paris, the Belarus president was clearly confused and offended. His bitterness was even greater when a similar agreement was signed by Ukraine. So "when the train had left," delayed attempts of Belarus authorities to reach a special agreement with NATO were sentenced to fail.

"We have to do our best in political and diplomatic efforts so that our relations with NATO and selective NATO countries were based on principles of trust, openness and partnership" – declared *Lukashenko* at the end of May 1997.<sup>58</sup> This effort was an attempt to demonstrate, in a practical way, the presentation of the Individual Partnership Programme in May after almost two and a half years of "creative efforts".<sup>59</sup> The change of political line in an opposite direction in a day, however, is not an easy task. Two years of a propaganda war against the "NATO monster" left its traces. This can be exemplified by the creation of an Independent Anti-NATO Union in parliament, the basic motto of which was the statement that "NATO remained an aggressive military organisation"; its objective was to explain "the dangers of NATO penetration into the East to our and other nations".<sup>60</sup>

Despite *Lukashenko's* rhetoric endeavours, Belarus authorities did not change their opinions of NATO. In 1998 *Lukashenko* again expressed his negative attitude towards NATO enlargement to the East. He stated in his own style that a few stations of electronic intelligence reaching Moscow operated in Poland. Therefore Belarus maintains, according to him, its anti-aircraft forces, the most powerful in the post-Soviet area, in a state of alert although the cost of this amounts to a billion dollars annually. For the future he envisages the Belarus army as a component of joint Russian and Belarus armed forces.<sup>61</sup>

---

58 C.Goliński: To NATO or from NATO?, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 20 June 1997, no. 142, p.9;

59 Bielorrussia joined Partnership for Peace on 11 January 1995;

60 Faithful Western Servants (Interview with the chairman of Bielorrussian foreign affairs parliamentary commission S.Konstantin), "Gazeta Wyborcza", 30 November 1998, no. 280, p.15;

61 "Wiadomości", OSW, 26 October 1998, no. 193, p.6;

## **Belarus in US Politics**

In February 1997, the US Department of State announced the introduction of a "new policy" towards Belarus. It consists in "a selective participation" and stipulates for reductions of higher level contacts and developing them on the level of "democratic elements in Belarus and independent non-governmental organisations".<sup>62</sup> Due to this decision, the USA will not offer any "direct help" for the state sector.

The Americans claim that they do not wish to isolate Belarus, they are open to conduct a dialogue and ready to change their line, provided that the leadership of the republic will take steps to start economic reforms agreed upon earlier with the IMF, respect internationally recognised human rights and democratic principles, in particular, the division of powers.

American politicians attempt to make the Belarus leadership understand that the West evaluates their course in a negative way and that its continuation will have severe consequences.

The president, however, does not lose his self-confidence. Appearing in October 1997 at a parliament session, he said that: "We understand that after the defeat in Belarus, the West and the United States need time to save their face and conduct the dialogue with Belarus".<sup>63</sup>

## **Attitude towards the European Security Architecture**

Belarus is not engaged in considerations concerning the future European security system, the analyses of which have been made in many countries of the region. Minsk does not currently see the need of either a domestic or an international presentation of its own vision of security in the region and on the European continent. This results mostly from priorities of Belarus politics directed towards comprehensive integration with Russia which would include as many areas of life as possible. Therefore *Lukashenko's* Belarus avoids articulating opinions which would look different from the Russian point of view. The president's statements, his administration and government members' statements on international relations issues, European security in particular, were mostly quotations of Russian opinions; Belarus politicians did not hide where these opinions originated. Thus Minsk fully accepts the vision of a secure Europe based on the OSCE which would become a general regional political forum (and where Russia would maintain its veto right) and the NACC/EAPC, which might be transformed into the main mechanism of military-political partnership. Both these structures would coordinate the

---

62 US New Policy Toward Belarus. "Belarusian Review", Spring 1997, p.11;

63 "Sovetskaja Belarussija", 11 November 1998 – quoted after: A.Rozanov: Vneš naja politika Belarussii: predstavlenija i realnosti, "Pro et Contra", vol. 3, no. 2, p. 79;

security activities of other Euro-Atlantic institutions such as NATO, WEU, EU and CIS.

### **Relations with Poland**

The position of Belarus in the region is of great importance for Poland as losing its independence would mean a change of the regional geo-political order and of the relations between Russia and Central Eastern Europe.

Although our relations with our eastern neighbour are better than those of the EU states, they cannot serve as an example. This has consequences on Poland's entry to NATO which causes sometimes hysterical and Stalin-like statements and evaluations. Poland is accused of conducting an anti-Belarus policy<sup>64</sup> and Belarus society is informed about threats resulting from it. It is said that the Polish army trained by Americans deploys a big number of soldiers along the border with Belarus. Recently the Deputy of the Foreign Affairs Commission, *Sergiej Kostian*, revealed that supposedly secret talks were held in which Germany suggested Poland an exchange: giving back Polish western lands in return for help to join Belarus to Poland.<sup>65</sup>

It is necessary to work out a concept of actions enabling going beyond two scenarios: on the one side moral pressure connected with political helplessness, on the other hand temptations of pragmatic activities which would ruin all Polish eastern political achievements.

I think that we should do our best so that the West will not recognise Belarus as a region practically belonging to Russia. We should continue our attempts to strengthen bilateral relations with Belarus and introduce it to various bilateral and multilateral international bodies, even though this would not bring immediate results.

Belarus does not have any effective ties with the West (apart from the new Yugoslavia, it is the only European country not belonging to the Council of Europe) and in this way does not respond to western opinion pressures. Complete subordination to Russia causes that Minsk cannot afford to change its politics irrespective of the fact whether *Lukashenko* maintains power or not. Simultaneously Moscow treats this country as a transportation corridor and an operational foreground for Russian forces. It uses Belarus for its games aimed at blocking NATO enlargement, not taking into account either its state of economy or respective human rights in this country.

Moscow urges not to transform Belarus into the Russian Federation's administrative – territorial unit but on shaping the system of relations with Minsk on the feudal lord – vassal principle. This perspective has clear consequences for Central Eastern Europe.

---

64 Faithful Western Servants (Interview with the chairman of Bielorussian foreign affairs parliamentary commission S.Konstantin), "Gazeta Wyborcza", 30 November 1998, no. 280, p.15;

65 A.Bilski: Freedom like Chains, "Polska Zbrojna", 1998, no. 51, p.31;

It seems that the West abandoned efforts to include Belarus, contrary to Ukraine, into its own sphere of influence. Firstly because Belarus is economically not a developed country and because it stopped its reforms. Secondly, it returned into Russia's sphere of influence.

## **Slovakia**

### **Introduction**

Slovakia is not a large country in comparison to Ukraine and Belarus, presented above. This country, however, has great significance in the whole stabilisation processes in Central Europe. The territory of Slovakia is an important transit area in European relations on the east – west and the north – south axis. Its importance grew after Poland and Hungary joined NATO.

Six years of independence for Poland's smallest (after Lithuania) neighbour is a very short period in the contemporary countries' history. Slovakia was never able to hold its independence.<sup>66</sup> Its history is not typical. The Slovaks lived in multinational countries during a significant part of their history. In practice, apart from a few exceptions, until 1968 they had no possibilities to manage their own matters. The scale of problems concerning creating a new sovereign state is not as large as is discussed above with Ukraine, but serious enough that forecasting the development of situations in such a young country is extremely difficult. Most of the analyses are still burdened with numerous stereotypes. In spite of many centuries of neighbourhood, the history of our southern neighbour, not only its present day, is not widely known in Poland. Our cultures are similar and we have the same Slavic heritage, language, mentality and religion. Shaping friendly relationships on the basis of culture seems to have great importance not only for our bilateral relations but also in the context of our region's entry into western European structures. They are necessary to create a unified, secure Europe.

It is true, however, that being so close in culture and language gives an illusory appearance of intellectual proximity, but in fact both nations had different histories, different enemies and often established their cooperation alliances differently.

Taking into account the security aspect, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia broke a unified geo-political space in Central Europe. According to some researchers this state was this space's nucleus.<sup>67</sup> It is said that facts are not to be discussed. Therefore, Poland in the time of the new "nations spring" after 1989, which also gave rise for the Slovak nation to exist, welcomed the new state with great warm-heartedness.

---

66 Art.7 of the Constitution stipulates for the possibility to enter a new state union with other states. Comp. The Slovak Constitution, Warsaw 1993;

67 A.Grajewski, Four Years After the Velvet Divorce (in) Polska w Europie, 23 issue, May 1997, p.14;

## **The Development of the Domestic Situation in Slovakia and its Influence on the Country's Relations with Other Countries**

The first years of the republic's independence (until 1995) were characterised with building the state. A new democratic state was shaped, albeit with tensions, but eventually with success. These processes were accompanied by severe economic problems.

In the period of 1995-1997, the reversal of earlier tendencies could be seen. In the area of politics, the perturbations in the political arena were accompanied by Slovakia's unclear attitude towards strengthening cooperation with institutional structures of Western European countries. Slovakia's domestic policy raised so many doubts that it threatened its membership in NATO and negotiations with the EU ceased due to the lack of democratic progress in social and political life. Quarrels about the referendum concerning Slovakia's participation in NATO, little social support for this idea and strong tendencies for a neutral orientation, while at the same time maintaining formally an orientation favouring NATO resulted in the fact that Slovakia was not included in the first group of states to join NATO in 1999.<sup>68</sup> Even the pope drew his attention to the "deficit of democracy" and expressed hope that this country would soon overcome it.<sup>69</sup>

The republic, however, achieved also economic successes. One of the highest GNP increases was achieved and unemployment and inflation remained under control, not threatening the republic. But these achievements were not strong enough to influence the lack of democracy in domestic relations. As time passed, new negative facts appeared in the national economy, the most dangerous of them were: a rapid growth of foreign and domestic debt, ceasing of privatisation, and a banking crisis. International economic and financial institutions such as IMF, OECD, EBRD also expressed their criticism in relation to the economic situation in Slovakia.

In the second half of 1998, when the coalition of opposition parties won the parliamentary and local government elections and a new government was established, the process of inner reconstruction and of building foreign relations started in Slovakia.

Prime Minister *M. Dzurinda* recognised an invitation to hold talks with the EU as a measure of the country's future success and after being appointed to his position he first went to Brussels. The expected success of Slovakia is conditioned, most of all, by achieving improvements in the economy and also

---

68 Premier V. Meciar assured NATO Secretary General Solana in Bratislava that the government did not change its favouring NATO policy. See *Rzeczpospolita* 7 May 1996. In 1998 the representatives of the Council of Europe, EU and OSCE tried to urge Slovak authorities to keep basic democratic state standards, but these actions proved ineffective. See: *"Rzeczpospolita"* 10 March 1998;

69 Report from John Paul's audience for the President of Slovakia. *"Rzeczpospolita"* 15-16 November 1997;

by the success of other endeavours, such as keeping the coherence of the many-party coalition government going.

The year 1999 is connected with the further progress of the internal democratisation processes in Slovakia. On May 29, *Rudolf Schuster*, governing coalition candidate, was chosen head of state in the presidential elections. These elections ended the sixteen-month vacancy of the republic presidency. And what is essential, they strengthened the government coalition increasing its chances to effectively implement the reforms already started.<sup>70</sup>

### **Slovakia's Relations with Other Countries**

Since the beginning of the republic's independence, thus, since the beginning of 1993, Slovakia declares, among the main goals of its foreign policy, maintaining good relations with its neighbours and Western Europe.<sup>71</sup> In practice, Slovakia has not managed to accomplish these goals. After official government statements in 1997, it was expected to start accession talks with the EU in 1998; this was in vain.<sup>72</sup> By the end of 1998 the relations with some neighbours were still not yet normalised. Numerous controversial problems had not been resolved with the Czech Republic, including the issue of Slovakia's debt. Prime ministers V. Meciar and V. Klaus did not meet officially until October 1997.

The biggest problem of foreign policy refers to the cooperation with Hungary. Issues concerning minorities, Hungarians in Slovakia and Slovaks in Hungary, reconstructing the dam on the Danube and a second nuclear power plant, created such difficult obstacles to establish mutual relations that it was an accomplishment between these two countries to just achieve at least their correct political level. Even signing the Treaty on Friendship in March 1995, which presented an opportunity to soften tensions in the dramatic, almost 1000 year history of these two nations' co-existence, did not have the expected influence upon positive changes in mutual relations.

Relations with Ukraine, mainly due to the Russian minority, calculated to about forty to a hundred and fifty thousand people, were not amicable. In the territories of former Carpathian Russia there even appear radical tendencies to create an independent state. These tendencies are additionally warmed up by the Carpathian Russians Union in Ukraine which, in order to accomplish its goals, seeks support in Russia.

It seems that Slovakia's relations with Austria were quite good. Austria was even called Slovakia's advocate in the West. The most important difficulty in

---

70 After the swearing in ceremony, the President firmly stressed that there is no other way for Slovakia than to become a part of a safe and democratic Europe, and that Slovak neutrality is just a dream as the country, like its members must join the European Union and NATO. Comp. "Rzeczpospolita", 16 June 1999;

71 See: Slovensko 1995, ed. M. Butora, R. Huncik, Bratislava, 1996, p.28;

72 See: Information Bulletin Slovak Information Agency, No. 35/1997, p.4;

mutual relations concentrated on the problem of the nuclear plant in *Mochovce*. The protests, raised not only by Austria but by the EU and the Parliament of Europe did not disturb the start of construction of this nuclear power plant. For Slovakia where 50% of its electricity needs are supplied by nuclear power plants, this was a crucial issue for the country.

During the time of the former government coalition, up to the end of 1998, Russia was Slovakia's key partner.<sup>73</sup> President *Yeltsin's* visit in 1993 and two further visits of the Russian prime minister in Slovakia and *Meciar's* stays in Moscow resulted in numerous agreements (about one hundred) in political, economic and military fields. Slovakia remains almost entirely dependent on Russian supplies of natural resources. The construction of the *Mochovce* nuclear power plant is conducted together with Russia. It is the only *Vyshegrad Group* country which cooperates widely with Russia in the military area. Also the friendship treaty signed in 1993 contains many matters projecting on Slovakia's future cooperation with NATO.

The new government led by Premier *M. Dzurinda* is trying to counteract these unfavourable tendencies. It has withdrawn from numerous obligations undertaken by its predecessors in office (e.g., from the purchase of S-300 rocket system in Russia). Under the International Monetary Fund's pressure that urged, among other things, budgetary cuts and fostering privatisation, it is implementing a program of economic reforms which is difficult and expensive in the public's opinion. The aim of the stabilisation programme is to decrease the budget deficit from forty to twenty billion korunas.<sup>74</sup>

### **Cooperation with Poland**

The Treaty between the Republic of Poland, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Federation Republic on Good Neighbouring Relations, Solidarity and Friendly Cooperation signed in Cracow in 1991 is the basis of Poland's friendly relations with Slovakia. The binding nature of this treaty and other agreements signed between Poland and Czechoslovakia from 1918 to 1992 was confirmed by the "Bratislava protocol" in 1993. The range of mutual cooperation was widely defined in the above mentioned treaty. It obliges, among other things, to support and coordinate efforts aimed at both countries' full participation in European integrated institutions (Art.1), it shows the possibility to provide mutual help in case of an aggression on one of the partners (Art.5.3), it compels to undertake cooperation between regions, provinces, towns and villages and to promote an effective and wide social character of the relations, it also obliges to create possibilities of comprehensive cooperation and the youth exchange (Art.7).<sup>75</sup>

---

73 See: A.Duleba, Slovensko – ruske hospodarske vstahy – viac otazok ako odpovedi (in) *Miezinarodni vstahy*, no.2, 1997;

74 See: "Rzeczpospolita", 1 June 1999;

75 Based on the text of the treaty published in: Kukulka J., *Neighbouring Treaties of Poland* Reborn, Wroclaw, 1998, pp. 213 – 218;

Similarly to the case of Ukraine, Poland recognised the sovereignty of Slovakia at its very beginning. The numerous meetings held on the levels of president, government, ministry and parliament dealt mainly with integration problems. Common strategic goals focused on future membership in the EU, NATO and on enlarging the cooperation in the CEFTA and the *Vyshegrad group* framework.

An unprecedented fact in this context was the Slovak head of state, *M. Dzurinda's*, participation in the meeting with John Paul II in *Stary Sacz* during the papal pilgrimage to Poland in 1998.

A great importance in bilateral relations is attached to military cooperation. Slovakia is included in the regional defence project which embraces building an integrated air traffic control system. Also border exchange seems a promising area.<sup>76</sup> It includes, among others, four regions, the biggest one is the Carpathian Region founded in 1993.<sup>77</sup>

Certainly, neither the size, nor Poland's participation and place in Slovakia's economic exchange with other countries can be satisfying. The Polish Republic is the fifth among Slovakia's partners in export and the eighth in import.

Slovakia, facing many domestic problems, defending its identity sometimes even by nationalistic verbalism, did not, however, undertake this type of rhetoric towards Poland. It was and is, like Poland, interested in developing regional cooperation, including within the *Vyshegrad group*, treating it as one of the conditions to approach the political, economic and military structures of Western Europe.

## **Perspectives**

The short, only few-year term of the Republic of Slovakia's independent sovereign existence makes forecasting difficult. It seems, however, that this country has real chances for firm participation in building a common European security space. Various domestic political problems seem not to threaten this young republic's stability of the state. The participation of the society to build democracy and the big participation in elections (84% attendance) are particularly valuable. These positive democratic standards were threatened by economic difficulties. Nevertheless, Slovakia maintains the chance of a clear 3 to 4% increase of GNP. The main challenges for the future of our southern neighbour are situated in the economic area and in inner security.

The present government coalition faces a difficult situation. The growing number of problems to solve is significant, but smaller than in the case of Ukraine. Fortunately, *Meciar's* argument that more democracy might favour

---

76 On 1 July, 1999 the agreement, negotiated for a long time, on border crossings between Poland and Slovakia was signed. In consequence, 22 new common border crossings have been opened;

77 The role of regionalism from Slovakia's point of view, see in A.Kotanová, *některé aspekty evropského regionalizmu* (in) *Medzinarodne Otázky*, 2-3 1997, pp. 75-80.

faster economic growth but that this does not apply to Slovakia is not raised any more.

Undoubtedly, an important issue is the nuclear power plant in *Mochovce*. But also in this case we have to take into account Slovakia's basic situation. 50% of the energy supply comes from nuclear energy and this poses a chance to limit the natural resources dependence on its eastern neighbours; in addition, opening this modern power plant will result in closing the old-fashioned power plant in *Bohunice*.

Discussing Slovakia's role in a regional dimension, it has to be stressed that Poland, in accordance with Slovakia's interest, should advocate Slovakian issues in Europe more effectively. It may be assumed that a wide representation of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia's governmental coalition will influence solving controversies between Slovakia and Hungary.

The improvement of relations with other countries has a crucial importance for Slovakia. The 21<sup>st</sup> century will hopefully favour other countries in the region and secure the integration of Europe in order to achieve political effects in this area.

Lt.Col. Henryk BINKOWSKI  
National Defense University  
Warsaw