

DECIDING ON NATO: A NECESSARY STEP OR A PREMATURE MOVE?

This previously unpublished text has been prepared for the conference on Ukraine – European Union relations (“Ukraine and EU Members or Neighbours?”) held by Kyiv Mohyla Academy in Kyiv in 2008. Although, over the six following years, the social context became rather outdated, we believe that the recent events of Maidan-2014 and the following conflict in the East of Ukraine bring the ideas expressed in the paper from hypothetical to practical dimension. Therefore, we offer this text as a retrospective clue for better understanding of Ukraine’s political outburst of 2014.

Ukraine has declared European and Euro-Atlantic integration to be its ‘number one’ foreign policy priority. However, a serious debate is going on on whether the declared course is indeed representing interests of Ukrainians. One can observe a serious split not only within Ukrainian political elite but also among the population. There is a clear geographical pattern of people’s attitude towards the EU and NATO. Ukrainians still have not created their common identity with more or less clear notion of Ukraine’s place and role in the contemporary world. One may distinguish at least two identities: the Ukrainian-nationalist one of western regions and the soviet identity in the east and south with central Ukraine wavering in between. This paper argues that Ukrainians are not ready to make a rational choice about NATO and European integration. The choice, if it were to be made, would be guided by emotions and stereotypes rather than understanding of real ‘pros’ and ‘cons’. Forcing people to decide about NATO membership at this point is a dangerous path towards not only refusing participation in Euro-Atlantic security system but also refusing the values of democracy and civil society. More so, treating NATO membership as a necessary step on the road to the EU may have a negative effect on public opinion on European integration.

Introduction. Ukraine’s foreign policy, in the last few years, has been marked by a significant shift from neutrality towards integration into the European Union and NATO. While European aspirations were officially announced during the presidency of Leonid Kuchma, NATO became a serious priority after Victor Yushenko took his office in 2005. However, instead of consolidating Ukrainian society around the idea of closer political and economic cooperation with the West, the latter shift has rather deepened a cleavage among Ukrainians. Political parties, seeking electoral support and lacking convincing arguments in their economic and social programmes, attempt to make the most of people’s sympathies for Russia and the West making societal tensions even worse. This paper raises the question whether it is the right time to bring Euro-Atlantic integration to Ukraine’s political agenda considering the effect it produces on Ukrainian society.

It is not only domestic debate that makes NATO choice a difficult one. Russia is strengthening its position as an international actor and clearly shows its negative attitude towards NATO expanding to Russian borders. Interestingly, preventing Ukraine from joining NATO is not only an end but also a means of influencing politics in Ukraine. Pro-Russian political parties actively use NATO-related rhetoric to gain electoral support in eastern and southern regions

of the country. Currently, Ukraine is being split based on people's loyalty to Russia. The split has a very clear geographical pattern with south and east being strongly pro-Russian, west mostly pro-European, and centre more or less neutral.

Changes in foreign policy chronologically coincide with serious political crisis inside Ukraine. The old spectrum of political parties has demonstrated its low vitality and trifling support among population. There is really little difference between economic and social platforms of the three main rivals' regardless of how they position themselves in liberal-social dimension. The Party of Regions, Nasha Ukraina and Yulia Tymoshenko's Bloc all suffer from strong social populism (with Yulia Tymoshenko clearly leading the populist marathon) and lack of any particular response to the challenges such as the need for structural economic reforms, fighting corruption, establishing the rule of law etc. As long as parties fail to convince electorate with any viable programme of reform they need some foundation to build up their campaigns and position themselves one against another. In such circumstances, foreign policy rhetoric appears to be the most convenient way to affect – otherwise rather passive – voters.

Electorate, for its part, has become rather dispirited after the Orange coalition failed to present any sensible course of development and what is more, did not deliver in fighting corruption and establishing the rule of law, which were the main motives of Orange revolution. Disillusion with current political elite brings society to a very important point of rethinking political agenda, which can be both promising and dangerous at the same time. On the positive side, there is a societal demand for fresh political forces that could offer a real alternative to corruption and inefficiency in state governance. But on the other hand, mistrust to the government and parties that back it can lead to mistrust to the values those parties declare. In other words, disillusion with Orange coalition, which is firmly associated with democratic, pro-European, more or less liberal pro-market economic course, may lead – and to some extent is already leading – towards disillusion with the very idea of establishing a European-type democracy with market economy.

One needs to bare all this in mind when trying to understand how NATO debate is held in Ukraine. It is impossible to separate the issue of NATO from the whole political context in the country. This paper aims at discussing the readiness of Ukrainian society for making a rational choice on its foreign policy priorities, especially in such a controversial matter as pursuing NATO membership. There are risks that attempts to hold a referendum on NATO membership at this point is likely to not only threaten Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic prospects but also put to doubt the very course of democratic and market-oriented reforms by fully discrediting political parties promoting them. One of the central arguments of this paper is that Ukrainian demos has not yet reached the necessary level of maturity to fully realise all pros and cons of Euro-Atlantic, as well as European, integration. The reason for this is lack of common identity

with more or less clear notion of Ukraine's place and role in the contemporary world.

A lot of issues touched upon in this paper are by no means new to academic discussions. Ukraine's electoral split between East and West has been drawing a lot of attention from the first years of independence (see for example Birch, 2000; White et al. 2001; Shyshackyi, 2006 etc.). There were also accounts dealing with identity differences among east and west of Ukraine (Pirie, 1996; Wanner, 1998). Yet, presently we attempt to raise a rather normative discussion stressing on subjective side of East and West identities in Ukraine and discuss 'stereotypical bundles' or mental associations which underlie popular reasoning on foreign policy matters. We extensively borrow from publicly available poll results published by Razumkov Center to ground our arguments.

East-west split at recent elections and public polls. Election results and public polls provide indicative data one may use to portray the general picture of public attitudes to foreign policy. Results of both parliamentary and presidential elections, since 1994, give evidence to suggest that attitude to Russia is a decisive factor causing major societal disagreement in Ukraine. Leonid Kuchma won the second round of presidential election in 1994 due to stronger support in east and south regions. Economic platforms of the candidates being almost identical, L.Kuchma built up his campaign on promises to make Russian the second official language and strengthen Ukraine's ties with Russia and CIS. It was these points in his programme that polarised Ukrainian electorate to an unprecedented level (Podolskiy 2007). In Ternopolska, Ivano-Frankivska, and Lvivska oblasts L.Kuchma gained as little as 3.8-3.9 percent while in Luganska oblast and Crimea he scored almost 90 percent support. His more pro-Ukrainian rival, Leonid Kravchuk scored roughly 9-10 percent in Crimea and Luganska oblast, while reaching 95 percent in several western oblasts (Podolskiy 2007).

Presidential election in 1999 was more about ideological choice rather than geopolitical. Unlike in 1994, economics replaced foreign policy in focus of debate, when L.Kuchma faced Communists' leader Petro Symonenko as his second round rival. L.Kuchma won with 56 percent support. The proportion of votes was more or less balanced in all regions except for five the most anticommunist oblasts, namely Lvivska, Ternopilska, Ivano-Frankivska, Chernivetska, and Zakarpatska. There was no definite east-west division of the country. P. Simonenko won in 10 oblasts, five of which were in the Central Ukraine while four eastern oblasts, namely Donetsk, Kharkivska, Sumska and Dnipropetrovka supported L.Kuchma (CVK 1999).

It was in 2004, when Russian issue arose again and Victor Yanukovich openly positioned himself as a pro-Russian candidate with strong support from Kremlin, Ukraine had been literally split in two. Election results, after the second round was re-held, showed a distinctive split between south-east regions and the rest of Ukraine. V. Yanukovich won a convincing victory in eight oblasts and Crimean Republic scoring from over 51 percent in Khersonska to

almost 94 percent in Donetsk oblasts. His rival Victor Yushenko, while having really negligible support in the east and south, persuasively won in sixteen oblasts gaining from over 63 percent in Kirovohradska to 96 percent in Ternopil'ska oblasts (CVK 2004). Parliamentary election in 2006⁴ had shown exactly the same geographic pattern. Eight south and east oblasts along with Crimea supported the Party of Regions, whereas Orange parties won in the rest of Ukraine (CVK 2006).

Public opinion polls show negative dynamics of support for NATO (Razumkov Centre 2008(c)). In 2002, slightly over 32 percent of Ukrainians were in favour of NATO membership and approximately the same percentage was against it. The number of NATO opponents reached its maximum in 2006 rising up to 65 and then falling down to 52 percent. On the contrary, the number of NATO proponents dropped from 32 percent in 2002 to 22 percent in 2008 keeping its lowest level of slightly over 15 percent in 2004-2006. Even though there is some positive shift since 2006, the majority of population still opposes Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the government.

While there is a clear geographic divide in support of pro-Russian and pro-European parties, regional distribution of support for NATO is more complicated. There still is a steady trend of increasing sympathy for NATO from south-east to west. However, there is no such a clear line, over which attitude to NATO changes so dramatically as is the case with support of political parties. Polls show dynamics of public attitude to NATO in regional breakdown (Razumkov Centre 2008(f)). It is only in the west of Ukraine where people would vote in favour of NATO membership. The number of NATO supporters grew up from about 45 percent in 2002 to over 51 percent in 2008. Interestingly, their number went as low as 30 percent in 2006 with a rapid increase from that point onwards. Eastern regions would strongly oppose Euro-Atlantic integration with about 75 percent of the population against NATO membership. While in 2002 the east was rather neutral with only 45 percent of those with negative attitude to NATO, this figure almost doubled in 2006. South has also doubled the number of those with negative perception of NATO since 2002. The general trend in the centre is an increase of NATO supporters from roughly 27 to 43 percent. Central regions also had the peak of negative attitude reaching 61 percent in 2006.

Polls on 'what should be a major priority in Ukraine's foreign policy?' show that Ukraine is wavering between Russia and the European Union (Razumkov Centre 2008 (g)). Over a half of the population in the west of Ukraine considers the EU to be the main foreign policy priority, while in the east 58 percent thinks it should be Russia. The centre also leans towards Europe, although it prevails over Russia by only 4 percent margin. The south follows the east with over 55 percent support for Russia being a number one foreign policy priority. It is worth of noting small attention people pay to the US as a Ukraine's strategic partner. This is hardly surprising but plays an important role in shaping people's attitude to NATO as long as the majority of Ukrainians perceive NATO

as an American (not international) organisation.

Polls on whether Ukraine should join the EU show that Ukrainians have more sympathy for the EU than for NATO. 47 percent of respondents think Ukraine should become the EU member while a little less than 23 percent think the opposite. The proportion of people supporting EU membership has significantly dropped compared to 2002 (Razumkov Centre 2008 (b)). Regional distribution of public attitude to the EU is more balanced with 33 percent of those in favour of the EU membership in the south, nearly 41 in the east, 58 in the centre and slightly less than 71 in the west (Razumkov Centre 2008 (a)). Although east and west still differ on their attitudes to the EU the difference is far milder than is the case with NATO.

Historical background and mixed identities . With the total area of 603.7 thousand square km and population of nearly 46 million Ukraine is among the largest countries in Europe. Considering its size and complex history one may expect to find significant regional differences in cultural and political environment. For many centuries Ukrainian territories were subject to international quarrels between Moscow in its different state forms and its European rivals. In other words there had been constant conflict between Russia and the West with the frontline going across Ukraine. It was only after the World War II that the confrontation line moved to Central Europe. It is not surprising then that both politicians and public perceive contemporary debate on Ukraine's prospects for joining NATO as a new stage of Russia confronting the West.

Many observers agree that existing lines of electoral division result, to a large extent, from the complex history of Ukraine (Shablii 2000, Shyshackiy 2006). As S.Birch has pointed out, there is no single or, at least, dominant explanation for regional electoral differences in Ukraine. Economic and historical factors being rather cross-cutting than reinforcing, electoral preferences have much more local complications to consider (Birch 2000). However, several recent elections demonstrate that after 2004 economic factor has become weaker compared to foreign policy direction.

One may suggest that struggle between the two foreign policy vectors is a struggle between two generalised identities of the east and the west of Ukraine rather than a real need for closer ties with any external partner. Each side craves for integration with a strong partner who would legitimise its identity and force the other part to accept it. East strives for Russia's protection from the 'danger' of being forced to accept the identity of the 'hostile' west-Ukrainian nationalists, while, for the western regions, joining the EU and NATO would stop Russia from any attempt to maintain its cultural and political influence, let alone military aggression.

Understanding those identities requires some deeper insight into Ukraine's history. Since the time of Bohdan Hmel'nitskiy, when, for the first time, Ukraine had attained its statehood, different parts of the country were controlled by neighbouring states. Every historic period had left its imprint on

people's culture and political beliefs. Complexity of Ukraine's history resulted in a nation with common ethnic background but with multiple identities.

Territories on the right bank of the Dniper that were controlled by Poland after Bohdan Hmelnytskyi and later became part of Russia (now referred to as 'centre') are politically more or less neutral with strong Ukrainian cultural identity. What makes them closely tied with Russia is Russian Orthodox Church, which always was politically active entity. These days its influence reaches as far as Ternopil'ska oblast.

In the territories, which belonged to Austro-Hungarian Empire for over a century (now called 'west'), people vote for pro-European parties. Those are the most patriotic regions, where NATO gets the majority support. Ethnically, people feel themselves Ukrainians there with Greek Catholicism being a dominant religion. Western regions have the most Europe-influenced culture – one will be hard pressed to find major differences in town architecture or even lifestyles between, for example, Lviv in Ukraine and Krakow in Poland. Most of western territories were controlled by Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia during the interwar period. They were the last to fall under communist rule and now are the most hostile to Soviet regime and any attempts to restore it.

East and south make quite a different story. Those territories remained unsettled for a long time because of water being scarce there. It was Russian Empire that started developing the Black Sea coast and coal mines of Donbass. Ethnic Russians, therefore, comprise a large proportion of population in those areas. Russian Empire paid special attention to the Black Sea coast thus playing a key role in development of such port cities as Odessa and Sevastopol. Most of economic and social infrastructure in the east and south of Ukraine was developed in the time of Soviet industrialisation. Intensive industry concentration required much work force. Workers had been brought from all over the USSR making those areas the least 'Ukrainian' both ethnically and culturally. Industrialised east and later developed south now belong to what one may call 'Soviet identity', which was best portrayed in a popular song: 'my address is not a house or street, my address is the Soviet Union'.

Language is another factor shaping contemporary identities in Ukraine. All of the west and most of the centre, except for some large cities, use Ukrainian in their everyday life. Almost all urban and some rural population in the east and south speak Russian. Kyiv is bilingual. Although most of Ukrainian citizens can speak Ukrainian the majority in the east and south does not use Ukrainian deliberately and insists on introducing Russian as a second official language. Both Leonid Kuchma in 1994 and Viktor Yanukovich in 2004 and 2006 promised to grant Russian the status of official language during their electoral campaigns. Interestingly, neither of them fulfilled the promise due to the fear of complete loss of support in the west of the country.

The World War II was among the most important factors to form the Soviet identity. Common victory over Nazi Germany, which cost millions of lives to Soviet people, created the feeling of unity among all republics of the

USSR. It would have been impossible to win in that war separately, without collective effort and joint resources. The World War II had created a strong image of a military threat coming from the West as well as a belief that only collective action of all Soviet republics could withstand it.

It was not only Nazi Germany itself that formed the image of an enemy during the World War II. Nationalist movements of OUN (Ukrainian Nationalist Organisation) and UPA (Ukrainian Rebel Army) fought for Ukraine's independence against both Germany and Soviet Army, mostly in the west of Ukraine. They kept resistance to the Communist regime for over decade after the war was over. Neither Soviet army nor police could effectively fight UPA guerrillas extensively supported by local population. Soviet government had launched massive propaganda against OUN-UPA that resulted in the major identity split between the east and the west of Ukraine. Being national heroes in western regions, OUN-UPA fighters remain the worst possible traitors for majority of people, particularly for older generations, in the rest of Ukraine. As one Soviet war hero said in a television interview 'Now, I would probably have a drink with a wermacht officer but I will never shake my hand with any OUN-UPA member'. Both sides now wish the government to acknowledge 'the historical truth' although there seems to be no way they can agree on what that truth is, at least until several generations change. Russia, for its part, puts a great political pressure on Ukraine's government for any attempt to recognise OUN-UPA fighters as war heroes as it automatically means recognition of Soviet Army as invaders who occupied Ukraine's territory against the will of its people. Regardless of how independent historians can interpret the role Ukrainian national movements played during the World War II, it is clear that hostile attitude towards OUN-UPA is among the strongest elements of Soviet identity in Ukraine, which premises on identifying a common enemy to stand against.

Taking all this into account, one would need to create a model, which would comprehend the whole mosaic of overlapping identity elements and group them in the way to explain public attitude to NATO and wider range of related foreign and domestic policy issues. As some observers point out, Ukrainians' identities are fluid (White, Light, Lowenhardt 2001). There are several dimensions, in which people lean toward opposite poles that may be, in general terms, attributed to east and west of the country. Every dimension will have its own cleavage with specific geography. Dominant religion, most commonly used language, narrow and wider cultural identities, understanding of patriotism, political and economic values are the elements, in our view, worth of considering when trying to portray geographic breakdown of Ukrainians' identities (see Table 1):

One may consider the table above as a speculative one, as it still needs to be verified empirically to be fully accurate, especially when trying to outline precise boundaries for each identity group. However it represents the general trend of identities change across the country and gives possible explanations to

the variable electoral geographies since 1994 presidential election. Depending on which dimension appears to be crucial in every particular election, electoral fault lines may go differently. This approach allows to foresee what political and economic outcome may follow if debate on NATO vs. Russia is put in focus in the electoral campaigns to come.

Table 1

Regional distribution of identities elements in Ukraine

	Location				
	West		Centre	East	South
	Controlled by (before joining the USSR)				
	Austro-Hungarian Empire, Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia	Poland, Russia	Poland, Russia (right bank of the Dniper); Russia (Left bank of the Dniper)	Russia	Russia
Prevailing religion	Greek-Catholic	Orthodox	Orthodox/atheist	Orthodox/atheist	Orthodox/atheist
Prevailing language	Ukrainian	Ukrainian	Ukrainian	Russian	Russian
Narrower cultural identity	Ukrainian	Ukrainian	Ukrainian	Ukrainian/Russian	Ukrainian/Russian
Patriotism	Nationalistic	Nationalistic	Soviet	Soviet	Soviet
Wider cultural identity	European	European	European/Soviet	Soviet	Soviet/Russian**
Political values	Democracy, pluralism	Democracy, pluralism	Democracy, liberalism/totalitarianism, strong state	Totalitarian, strong state	Totalitarian, strong state
Economic values	Liberal	Socialist, state regulated	Socialist, state regulated	Socialist, state regulated/liberal*	Socialist, state regulated/liberal**

* - pro-market bloc 'Za Edinu Ukrainu' ('For the Unified Ukraine') convincingly won over Communists in Donetsk oblast at parliamentary election in 2002.

** - Some locations, mostly on the Black Sea Coast, where economic development was boosted by pre-Communist Russia, has much more 'Russian' rather than 'Soviet' identity supporting the idea of restoring great Russian statehood, unlike the most part of the southern regions, mostly developed and settled in the Soviet era.

*** - same as previous locations are more prone to liberal economic reforms compared to the rest of the South.

As recent political developments show, the most radical split appears to be in the way historical patriotism is understood. The latter has very deep emotional background, particularly among older generations, who still remember the World War II or grew up in the after-war period. If other issues can be debated with a possibility of reaching societal consensus, recognition of nationalist movements veterans as the World War II heroes seems quite

impossible, at least until generations change.

Foreign policy choices and modern identity deficit

After looking through political and historical background of public attitudes one may come back to the original question of this paper on whether deciding on Ukraine's membership in NATO is a necessary step, an unavoidable challenge of today, or, merely, an untimely initiative of political elites. To answer this question one also needs to answer how rational people's choice can be in current circumstances.

To make a rational choice one needs to be, at least, well informed on the matter. This is, definitely, not the case with Ukraine's public awareness about NATO. According to public polls (Razumkov Centre 2008 (e)), only 5.4 percent of Ukrainians think they are well informed about NATO. The highest level of self-assessed awareness is recorded in the western regions reaching only 7.3 percent. When asked about different areas of NATO activities and cooperation with Ukraine, peacekeeping operations scored the highest rate of slightly under 5 percent. In both polls there was a majority of respondents who assessed themselves as partly informed with medium and low levels of awareness. Less than 40 percent of respondents in the east and south of Ukraine wish to be better informed about NATO while over 50 percent are indifferent to the issue. Over 62 percent in the west and 57 in the centre wish to learn more about NATO and this means they are uncertain about their attitude to the bloc, which may change. However, about 36 percent in the west and 27 in the centre would not care about knowing more.

Polls on self-assessed awareness about the EU (Razumkov Centre 2008 (d)) show the same tendency. 6.5 percent in the West think they know enough about the EU, while in the east this figure is only 3.3 percent. Centre and south have 3.8 and 4.7 percent respectively. Close to 50 percent in the east and south and about 41 and 47 percent in the west and centre think they know very little about the EU. However, people seem to be more eager to learn more about European integration. Polls show that almost 63 percent in the west, 59 percent in the centre, slightly less than 44 percent in the south and over 50 percent in the east wish to know more about the EU. Such results correspond with, generally, more positive attitude to the EU compared to NATO.

There appears to be the first important controversy: with such a low level of awareness, the majority of people have made up their minds on whether they wish Ukraine to become NATO member. Only 7.3 percent of the population in western regions of Ukraine think they know enough about NATO and yet over 51 percent would vote for Ukraine joining this bloc. Only 9 percent of Ukrainians would have difficulty to make a decision now and about the same number would not go voting. The same applies to the choice on the EU membership. With a minor percentage of those who think they know enough about European integration the majority would vote in favour or against the EU membership. As one may conclude, if a referendum on NATO or the EU were to be held in the near future, it is unlikely that people would make their choice

based upon rational considerations. Seemingly, there is much more stereotypes and emotions involved than is needed for such a responsible choice.

One possible explanation for active but irrational choices people make is the lack of common Ukrainian identity in the contemporary world. The only element of the mixed 'identities bag' that all Ukrainians share, as discussed in the previous section, is their ethnic background. Latest developments proved this to be insufficient to create any common vision of what kind of Ukraine Ukrainians wish to have. They wish to have a 'European state' but they have very vague idea of what a 'European state' means. They wish to have trustworthy system of security but they cannot agree on what is the threat to be protected from.

One can, probably, explain this modern identity deficit by the series of disillusionments people have had since Ukraine gained its independence. The overwhelming support for Ukraine's independence at the referendum in 1991 is difficult to believe these days. There were two possible reasons for such a strong support. First one was, probably, the desire to avoid further participation in armed conflicts, which had nothing to do with Ukraine's security, as was the case with the Afghanistan War of 1979-1989. The second reason was the hope for effective economic reform. Soviet economy experienced deep structural economic crisis. Mikhail Gorbachov's reforms known as 'Perestroika' did not bring much improvement if, indeed, not worsen the situation. Soviet system of redistribution of public goods proved to be completely inadequate. Great Ukrainian paradox of the late 1980s was a severe sugar deficit in stores of the biggest sugar producer in the USSR. People blamed 'the Centre' for taking republics' output without providing sufficient compensation or just distribution of wealth. When Ukraine gained its independence in 1991 there were two main premises for the new Ukrainian identity. These were dedication to peace, which was embodied in the principle of Ukraine's international neutrality; and dedication to market economic reforms that should have improved imbalances of state planned economy the country suffered for several decades.

The following decade of 1990s proved to be disastrous for Ukraine's economy. It appeared to be that not only the system of economic management was defective. The whole post-soviet economy was imbalanced and inefficient in market environment. Most of the industries declined, the country was overwhelmed with unprecedented inflation, while inefficient use of international financial assistance increased the debt load on Ukraine's stagnating economy. Mid-1990s were, possibly, the worst years for Ukrainians in the second half of the XXth century. There was massive disillusion with market-oriented reforms. People recollected relatively prosperous times of pre-Gorbachov's era creating an image of 'good old times' when there was a great state with huge economy, where government took care of ordinary people ensuring low prices, good salaries and general order.

Disillusion with having deep and long lasting crisis instead of immediate economic progress made one of the premises for new Ukrainian identity

disappear creating the first societal cleavage of socialist state planning vs. liberal market economy values and the first pair of common post-soviet stereotypes. The first one was about blaming the West and nationalists in destroying the great state and prosperous economy. The second one, on the contrary, was about blaming communists who remained on every level of state governance and made any attempt of market reforms inefficient and fruitless. For the former, distant soviet past became an abstract image of good that was lost and can hardly be restored in the near future but can be reached somewhat closer if socialist and communist parties came to power and reunited republics of the former USSR. For the latter, economically prosperous and democratic Europe was the destination to aim to, although very few among both ordinary people and political elite had any particular idea of what 'European model' meant in practice. More so, a vague image of 'European values' became something of an ideal model, which, for many excuses, was not suitable for use in local 'post-soviet conditions'.

After the debate on international security followed the economic one and the possibility of a new political clash between Russia and the West emerged, the second premise for national consensus, namely neutral international policy, has disappeared. After politicians started openly promoting European and Euro-Atlantic integration, the second east-west cleavage of historical identities has revealed itself. The split is now reinforced with intensive propaganda playing on people's emotions. Pro-Russian parties and public organisations promote the stereotype of NATO being the new shape of the hostile West led by the US and aiming to paralyse the strength of Slavic states. Another stereotype of anti-NATO propaganda is associating NATO with Ukrainian nationalist movements of the World War II period and fascism. The latter has very little logic behind it, but has very strong emotional effect on pro-Russian part of the population, particularly on those with Soviet identity, who still remember the World War II or its aftermath. 'No to Hitler's servants!', 'NATO is a war against Slavs', 'No to fascism and nationalism!' are typical slogans used on anti-NATO rallies by pro-Russian parties (UNIAN, 2008).

On the contrary, Ukrainians with European identity who are concerned about Russia's increasing influence on Ukraine's politics, feel the lack of own resources to counteract it. They have created a stereotype that if Ukraine becomes part of a powerful Western economic or/and political bloc it would effectively deal with Russian political influence. The weak spot of their logic is underestimation of major identity differences within Ukraine, especially those of language and new interpretations of Ukrainian history.

There is a variety of choices to be made by Ukrainian people including many separate issues of economic, political and social nature, e.g. degree of economic liberalisation, government model, degree of neutrality in foreign policy etc. However, one may observe several stereotype bundles emerging in Ukrainian society, in which crucial political and economic orientations mix together with identity associations. Language or history should not matter when

people wish to agree on the way the rule of law is to be established. However, with stereotype bundles emerging they seem to matter. Democracy, civil society, and market economy are all associated with the Western way of development. The West may have positive and negative associations in Ukrainian society. It is very attractive in economic terms and even pro-Russian forces cannot deny that. However, if the Western way is bundled with NATO membership, and NATO, in its turn, is associated with the hostilities of the Cold War and with horrors of fascist invasion, putting Euro-Atlantic integration on the agenda can, possibly, lead to total refusal of the whole 'Western bundle', including European aspirations, democracy, market reforms etc. On the contrary, Euro-Atlantic integration supporters bundle NATO with the only possible way to ensure Ukraine's political independence from Russia's influence, hence the only way to restore Ukraine's cultural and political identity. Loosing the chance to join NATO leads, in their view, to not only international security outcomes but to loosing a historic chance of developing a European-type of state.

Public stereotypes together with low awareness about NATO and the EU are counterproductive factors that make rational public choice on European and Euro-Atlantic integration impossible for both proponents and opponents. Political elites may have their reasons for starting promotion campaign on NATO. However, there is a danger that bundled, in public perception, with 'western way of development' this sensitive and controversial issue may cause denial of such important western values as democracy, the rule of law, and market economy. Unless existing stereotypes are overcome, premature public choice about pursuing NATO membership may have far greater negative impact than mere change of foreign policy priorities.

Conclusions. Electoral geography analysis, combined with results of the range of public polls, demonstrates several split lines dividing Ukrainian society according to people's cultural, political and economic orientations. Public attitude to NATO represents one of the major Ukraine's societal disagreements of today. Ukrainian society is likely to refuse NATO membership if forced to make a decision at this point. However, the choice is unlikely to be rational in current circumstances. While people have very limited knowledge about NATO and its activities, the majority has a clear, either positive or negative, attitude to the bloc and would not hesitate to vote for or against NATO if the referendum were to be held.

Supposedly, attitudes premise upon public emotions and stereotypes fed by existing societal cleavages. Although the nature of cleavages is complex and involves both historical and economic factors, regional identity differences are the most obvious explanation for existing splits. This is particularly true to the most irritating issues of language and history interpretation. It appears that Ukrainians suffer from modern identity deficit. Identity deficit does not allow stepping over the irresolvable societal disagreements, which have their roots in the past. People compensate the lack of modern identity by several stereotype bundles, which can be attributed to either pro-European west or pro-Russian east

identities. Generally speaking, current east and west identities depend on people's loyalty to Russia and attitude to the West.

Existing stereotype bundles may be harmless in themselves. However, considering influence of regional identity elements on electoral splits cutting Ukraine in several directions, their possible outcomes can be destructive. While many of identity differences are more or less neutral in contemporary conditions, some are the matter of serious disagreement, which is difficult, and in some cases impossible, to overcome. These include attitude to nationalist movements and veterans of OUN-UPA, interpretation of Soviet history and its role for Ukrainian people, language policy etc. These are the issues, one should better leave aside from public debate as long as they prove to be counterproductive in creating new Ukrainian identity and rather deepen societal cleavages than help to alleviate them.

Ukraine now faces many domestic and international challenges that require societal agreement. Those include finding the way of democratisation, developing civil society, seeking the optimal economic model, responding to the challenges of globalisation, repairing system of state governance, fighting corruption etc. Most of those challenges can be responded without bringing up issues that worsen identity cleavages. As long as NATO is unlikely to gain sufficient support among Ukrainians, there is a possibility that associating NATO with pro-European or simply pro-democratic political forces may lead to the refusal of the whole course of developing a democratic European-type state with market economy and civil society. Based on the same rationale, one may expect that portraying NATO membership, as a necessary step on the road towards the EU, will have negative effect on public attitude towards European integration rather than positive impact on attitude to NATO.

A possible way to rethink Ukraine's political agenda, in our view, is through focusing on new Ukrainian identity, the one that would skip over debate on language policy, rethinking history, and immediate choice between East and West (NATO membership in particular). By breaking the 'bundle stereotype' one may ensure that western values of democracy, civil society and liberal economy are not being hostages of untimely foreign policy choices. Making those values a priority, political elite may use the time to overcome public emotions and provide enough information for people to make a rational choice. However, at present this choice seems to be premature.

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