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SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE ON UKRAINE-EU RELATIONS THROUGH THE PRISM OF “THE EUROPEAN IDEA”

Abstract: After the enlargement of the EU in 2004–2007, the European aspirations of the post-Soviet countries began to evoke more positive responses from Brussels. As for Ukraine, its European choice was not made today, but it faces many external and internal problems. It can be viable only if foreign policy decisions are compatible with the identity of the Ukrainian people. Some features obviously bring the Ukrainian strategic culture closer to the European one than to any other. But only in 1999, in the EU’s Joint Strategy for Ukraine, was the Union’s recognition of the European choice of Ukraine heard. The academic discourse on Ukraine’s relations with the EU demonstrates that Ukraine suffered because its European partners did not perceive it in the way Ukrainians wanted. But if we dispassionately examine the activities of Ukraine’s political elites, Europeans’ fears about such a partnership become clearer: the use of the „European idea” in Ukraine was widespread, but not deep. This led to a crisis of confidence in Ukraine’s relations with the EU and the strategic uncertainty of both actors regarding the future format of relations. At the turn of 2013–2014, Ukraine itself, as a state with common borders with the EU and the Russian Federation, found itself caught between the consequences of soft normative Europeanization (in the form of democratic transformations within the country) and the onslaught of the aggressive „Russian world”. Paradoxically, Russia’s war against Ukraine prompted the EU to radically change its policy towards Ukraine and intensify its support in all directions, including the intensification of the dialogue on EU membership. But in order to develop an effective strategy, the EU, like Ukraine, needs a fundamentally new approach, built not only on the solution to today’s problems related to the war but also on a scientific understanding of the peculiarities of Ukrainian identity and deep processes within the transitory Ukrainian society.

Streszczenie: Po rozszerzeniu UE w latach 2004–2007 europejskie aspiracje krajów posowieckich zaczęły spotykać się z coraz bardziej pozytywnymi reakcjami Brukseli. Jeśli chodzi o Ukrainę, jej europejski wybór nie został jeszcze dokonany, ale stoi przed wieloma problemami zewnętrznymi i wewnętrznymi. Może to być wykonalne tylko wówczas, gdy decyzje w zakresie polityki zagranicznej będą zgodne z tożsamością narodu ukraińskiego. Niektóre cechy w oczywisty sposób zbliżają ukraińską kulturę strategiczną do europejskiej bardziej niż jakiegokolwiek innej. Jednak dopiero w 1999 r. we Wspólnej Strategii UE dla Ukrainy pojawiło się uznanie przez Unię europejskiego wyboru Ukrainy. Dyskurs akademicki na temat relacji Ukrainy z UE pokazuje, że Ukraina ucierpiała, ponieważ jej europejscy partnerzy nie postrzegali jej tak, jak chcieli tego Ukraińcy. Jeśli jednak bezstronnie przyjrzymy się działalności elit politycznych Ukrainy, obawy Europejczyków przed takim partnerstwem staną się zrozumiałe: posługiwanie się „ideą europejską” na Ukrainie było powszechne, ale niezbyt głębokie. Doprowadziło to do kryzysu zaufania w stosunkach Ukrainy z UE i strategicznej niepewności obu aktorów co do przyszłego formatu stosunków. Sama Ukraina na przełomie lat 2013, 2014, jako państwo posiadające wspólne granice z UE i Federacją Rosyjską, znalazła się pomiędzy konsekwencjami miękkiej normatywnej europeizacji (w postaci przemian demokratycznych wewnątrz kraju) a atakiem agresywnego „rosyjskiego miru”. Paradoksalnie wojna Rosji z Ukrainą skłoniła UE do radykalnej zmiany polityki wobec Ukrainy i zintensyfikowania wsparcia we wszystkich kierunkach, w tym intensyfikacji dialogu na temat członkostwa w UE. Aby jednak opracować skuteczną strategię, UE, podobnie jak Ukraina, potrzebuje zasadniczo nowego podejścia, opartego nie tylko na rozwiązaniu współczesnych problemów związanych z wojną, ale także na naukowym zrozumieniu specyfiki ukraińskiej tożsamości i głębokich procesów zachodzących w obrębie transformującego się społeczeństwa ukraińskiego.

Key words: discourse, Ukraine-EU's Relations, “The European Idea”.

After the enlargement of the EU in 2004–2007, the European aspirations of post-Soviet countries began to evoke more positive responses from Brussels. Until today, Ukraine's European decision has still not been made, and it faces many external and internal problems. It can be viable only if foreign policy decisions are compatible with the identity of the Ukrainian people. Obviously some features bring the Ukrainian strategic culture closer to the European one than to any other. But it was only in 1999, in the EU's Joint Strategy for Ukraine, that the Union recognized Ukraine's European choice. The academic discourse

on Ukraine's relations with the EU demonstrates that Ukraine suffered because its European partners did not perceive it in the way Ukrainians wanted. But if we dispassionately examine the activities of Ukraine's political elites, Europeans' fears about such a partnership become clearer: the use of the "European idea" in Ukraine was widespread, but not deep. This led to a crisis of confidence in Ukraine's relations with the EU and the strategic uncertainty of both actors regarding the future format of relations. At the turn of 2013–2014, Ukraine itself, as a state sharing common borders with the EU and the Russian Federation, found itself caught between the consequences of soft normative Europeanization (in the form of democratic transformations within the country) and the onslaught of the aggressive "Russian world". Paradoxically, Russia's war against Ukraine prompted the EU to radically change its policy towards Ukraine and intensify its support in all directions, including the intensification of dialogue on EU membership. But in order to develop an effective strategy, the EU, like Ukraine, needs a fundamentally new approach, built not only on the solution to today's problems related to the war but also on a scientific understanding of the peculiarities of Ukrainian identity and deep processes within the transitory Ukrainian society.

Since the end of the Cold War, the European Union has become the main structured pole of interstate relations on the European continent. The attraction of this pole was very strong, which demonstrated the desire of 20 countries of Northern, Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe to join the club of developed countries. The EU responded to these aspirations partially, but not completely. Today, not all Balkan states are in the EU; The EU also did not make promises to the countries that left the Soviet Union (except the Baltics), because it linked its general strategy to a "strategic partnership" with Russia (June 1999); with other post-Soviet countries, in particular with Ukraine, similar intentions were signed later (December 1999). After Maastricht, EU leaders considered all European countries to be part of the process of Europeanization, but not European integration, and the latter was the most important for the newly independent countries, because the idea of Europe does not exist in the minds of post-Soviet peoples outside the EU.

European integration turned out to be a two-way process: it is the process of proposals from the EU in the form of membership or individual multilateral initiatives and bilateral agreements (Association Agreement, etc.), and now the process of implementation by European states of a foreign policy course of rapprochement with the EU. At the same time, regionalization is gaining momentum, which most scientists consider rather in the context of fragmentation than globalization. In this process, the category of "needs" of countries from the same

region, and expectations from that region of joint activity, is important. Josef Kukulka, an authority on the systems approach, called such needs “aspirational” (from the Latin *aspiratio* – breathing): a desire for something, for example, a desire to achieve a goal, a desire to implement ambitious plans, etc..¹ After all, the very appearance of general needs is a peculiar reaction of the states of one region to “a certain state of dissatisfaction with the specific conditions of existence and development” and “a subjective feeling of a certain inadequacy.” This was the historical mission of the EU, which the European Economic Community presented to the countries of the “new” Europe – the same needs of humanitarian values and political and economic standards.

It was important for the EU to form a common European consciousness and identity in countries that are ready to share the values of Europeanization based on democratic principles. The policy of the EU regarding the spread of human rights and freedoms, the foundations of the market economy and the rule of law throughout the European space should serve as a meaningful tool. The operative mechanism of the spread of Europeanization was the integration (not necessarily with the aim of gaining membership in the EU) of individual state and non-state actors, the formation of a regional European political-geographical complex of economic cooperation and security within the borders of geographical Europe.

The collective identity of a nation is created socially through the construction of borders. In political science since the 1980s, borders have been considered not only spatially, as physical borders between states, but also symbolically, as invisible borders in people’s minds. These boundaries are constructed discursively and must be understood as imaginary boundaries that separate “us” from “them” and are expressed in various social practices. The creation and destruction of these borders is an important element in the evolution of a nation’s identity. Anssi Paasi created an analytical foundation of social discourses of the study of the connection “identity – borders”. He singled out four discourses: “we/here”, “others/there”, “we/there”, “we/they”. Traditionally, nation-building is based on two main discourses: “we/here” and “others/there”. That is why we are interested in “them”. The discourse “we/here” is used for integration within a territorial unit, such as a national state (in our case, Ukraine). The discourse “others/there” is based on the process of “othering”, which is used to separate the nation from “others”. These discourses unite the population within a certain territory, create a national identity and anchor it to a certain central territory².

1 Kukulka J. *Problemy teorii stosunków międzynarodowych*. PWN, 1978.

2 Paasi A. *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness: The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border*. Chichester, 1996.

Paasi's work helps to understand why, despite its popularity, the European idea is so difficult to "take root" in our territory. However, it does not illuminate the political components of this process and does not help to understand whether and to what extent the peoples living in the neighbourhood (Ukrainians and Russians, Ukrainians and European peoples) are compatible and exactly identical.

In order to understand them better, it is necessary to turn to the concept of strategic culture (the historical and cultural basis of the state's foreign policy), which is still popular among foreign political scientists and has recently been highlighted in Ukrainian political science. According to the most common definition, strategic culture is "a set of values, guidelines, beliefs, and patterns of behaviour that a nation shares and that originate from social experience and learned narratives, forming a collective identity regarding the respective goals and means of ensuring national security"³.

Colin Gray believed that the concept of "strategic culture" is useful because it creates a context for certain strategic choices. In other words, it helps us a lot when we interpret why decision makers make certain choices. Gray also acknowledged that circumstances force decision-makers to make choices that may go against the state's strategic culture. We can expect that in these circumstances they might have encountered resistance. For example, there would be some debate in society about whether the course of action taken is entirely desirable. Opposition politicians could criticize the new direction of the government's foreign policy. Those who shape public opinion in the media would perhaps also participate in the debate; and public opinion may well show a degree of rejection or even direct opposition to the new course.⁴

Today, one of the least researched cases remains the strategic culture of Ukraine. It is still in the process of development, just like the Ukrainian nation. This means that modern challenges and threats to Ukrainian security are the factors that change the Ukrainian strategic outlook.

Ukrainian leaders were forced to form alliances with their neighbours to avoid war with two or more enemies from the West, East, and South. Consequently, the policy of developing security through diplomacy has made diplomacy one of the most active methods of nation building. At most, it contributed to the formation of such a fundamental feature of Ukrainian strategic culture as the search for a strong partner state, which often led to an asymmetric partnership such as the "patron-client" relationship. Historical experience shows that

3 *Introduction*. In: *Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction*. N.Y., 2009.

4 Gray C. *Strategic Culture as Context: the First Generation of Theory Strikes Back*. "Review of International Studies", 1999, Vol. 21, № 1.