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Ukraine – Dependence Instead of Neutrality*

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Since the end of 2013 the attention of both the media and diplomats has been occupied by Ukraine. It was then, which came as a surprise for the western diplomats and intelligence services, that the authorities of Ukraine had refused to sign the agreement on the accession with the EU at the EU summit in Vilnius. A couple of months later, Moscow began to strengthen its influence in Ukraine using power. One may inquire how did it happen that the negotiators from Brussels assumed that Russia would stay passive when the EU would start to move Ukraine, the state on the Russian border, towards the western zone? One may ask what was Maidan with its casualties for, since currently Ukraine is in the state of chaos, with hostile military forces on its territory, has lost Crimea and Sevastopol, as well as its fleet, has no authority over two provinces, Lughansk and Donetsk, and the power in Kiev is held by the oligarchs? Did the EU diplomats want this? How is it possible that someone has robbed the Ukrainians of the revolution they made in Maidan?

As far as I am concerned, to comprehend the problem with Ukraine first of all one should define what the crisis in Ukraine is about. Then, one can search for the

ways of solving the situation, the crisis, which long ago ceased to be the internal affair of Ukraine and became the international issue. It is widely known that it was not about replacing one Ukrainian government with another, or bilateral relations between Ukraine and Russia, or on the other hand, between the EU and Ukraine. The current crisis in Ukraine is the clash between the powers over influences in Ukraine, and strictly speaking, which influence zone will Ukraine be in and what its policy will be like¹.

It is worth mentioning that Ukraine has never been a sovereign state². The agreement from 1994, so called Budapest Memorandum, signed in 1994 by Ukraine, Russia, USA and Great Britain was, in my opinion, negative. It stated that Ukraine would give up the status of a nuclear state. I can hardly comprehend why Ukraine signed such an agreement in 1994, how it is possible that being then the third nuclear power in the world (it had 1200 strategic nuclear warheads and 2400 tactical ones) it agreed with such a dictate. It was not the allies' agreement, but it contained guarantees, which

¹ *Stany Zjednoczone i Ukraina w zmieniającym się świecie*, ed. M. Łach, M. Chrzczanowicz, Warszawa 2011.

² W.A. Serczyk, *Historia Ukrainy*, Wrocław 2009.

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implies the uneven position of the parties. Ukraine consented then to the other states to be the guarantors of its borders and sovereignty. The powers took obligation not to use force against the integrity of Ukraine and grant it the assistance in case of nuclear threat. This in turn provided them with the right to interfere with its policies. Moreover, the states that granted guarantees have opposite interests, therefore their expectations towards Ukraine differ too. Thus, Ukraine itself had de facto agreed on the protectorate status, which might have been done unconsciously, yet undeniably. It was obvious for Moscow that the Russian guarantees were valid as long as Ukraine preserved its status of 1994, i.e. the status of the state beyond the blocs. The agreement ceases to be valid the moment Ukraine transforms its geopolitical status³.

In February 2014, when influenced by Maidan the parliament in Kiev appointed the new government, it immediately announced the choice of pro-western option, which meant the breach of the balance of influence in Ukraine so far, and the change of its geopolitical status. Instead of focusing on strengthening the power, economic and political reforms, new Ukrainian team had immediately craved for the change of the geopolitical location of their state. The decisions were made without the previous consultations with the powers, or in-depth analysis of the geopolitical situation of Ukraine, resulting from the current balance of powers in the world. It was ignored that the USA is overseas and has numerous common worldwide interests with Moscow, as well as that Russia has great assets on Ukrainian territory (bases, fleet, multimillion minority on a compact area) and considers this country to be of immense significance for its security⁴.

The initiation of every diplomatic activity ought to be preceded with analysis, i.e. getting familiar with the doctrine of an opponent. Getting familiar with it does not mean approving it, yet one should be aware of what the opponent wants, in order to be able to fight against him and achieve set objectives.

What the geopolitical argument over Ukraine is about. To my view the EU states do not merely aim at introducing Ukraine to the Union⁵. Brussels's main objective is to prevent Ukraine from becoming a part

of homogenous political and economic organization Russia is establishing. Whereas Russia does not want Ukraine to become a member of the UE and NATO, to preserve its status of the beyond the blocks state. As long as Kiev conducted the policy without alliances, i.e. was balancing between the East and West, Moscow respected the Budapest agreement. De facto these are the frames limiting the politicians searching for the solution of the argument, especially if they want to avoid the risk of prolonging chaos, war or the loss of authority over a part of the Ukrainian territory⁶.

Russian policy, especially concerning foreign affairs, is predictable for the attentive observers from the old school of Soviet studies (J.M. Bocheński, L. Łabędź, Z. Brzezinski). The basic rule of Russian diplomats is acknowledging the primacy of power over international law, and further on acknowledging the primacy of geopolitical safety, perceived in a particular way, over interim political or economic benefits. It also has to be remembered that in Moscow they like and know how to estimate, especially the military potential. According to Russian analysts it is nuclear warheads that need to be counted first of all. Their number determines whom Moscow is ready to negotiate with. It means that only the USA matters for Moscow, and it is only the USA that Moscow wants to and has to take into account. No other potentials like GNP, the dynamics of increase, demography, etc. are treated seriously in Moscow. In conclusion, international law is of little significance for Moscow, only warheads are of importance. Formally, states are equal, yet some are more important than the others.

Basing on many examples Moscow knows exactly how the West treats its allies and respects international law. It is well remembered that it was the professor of law and the US president Wilson who had settled the foundations of the international law of the 20th century during the conference in Versailles. It was the assumptions formulated by him that the Atlantic Charter was based on. However, Moscow remembers well that the very same rules of international law were many times treated in instrumental way by western states. We can enumerate the agreements of Yalta, Teheran, Potsdam, the Korean War, Berlin crisis, Sues crisis, the aggression on Hungary and Czechoslovakia, Cuban crisis, the war in Vietnam, the unification of Germany, expanding the NATO. In all of the above-mentioned cases crises or

³ A. Szeptycki, *Ukraina wobec Rosji. Studium zależności*, Warszawa 2013.

⁴ *Ukraina w stosunkach międzynarodowych*, ed. T. Kapuśniak, M. Pietraś, Lublin 2007.

⁵ P. Kost, *Ukraina wobec Unii Europejskiej 1991–2010*, Toruń 2012.

⁶ *Polska i Ukraina w procesach bezpieczeństwa europejskiego*, ed. W. Gizicki, Lublin 2007.

problems were solved by means of bilateral negotiations between Moscow and Washington, without the participation of the states which a crisis or problem directly concerned. It was an unwritten rule, commonly accepted, that each superpower had its zone of influence. American politicians in the context of the reset policy have recently referred to the topic. They stated directly that Moscow, being the superpower, must have its own playground (preying area).

Since the Second World War Moscow has wanted to solve international problems only with the participation of the USA and only in confidential way. By the means of confidential negotiations it wants to co-decide on which country belongs to which zone of influence. G7 or G8 clubs are of no interest for Moscow since they are merely a theatre with too many to make decisions. The Kremlin authorities, firstly Kremlin councilors in press and then Russian diplomats, had several times signaled the need to discuss the status of Ukraine. The conditions of Moscow towards Ukraine are clear – this country can neither be a member of the NATO nor of the EU. It can be mentioned here that during the conference on safety held in Munich in February 2014 representatives of Germany promised Moscow that issues concerning Ukraine would be solved with its participation and with taking into account its interests. Hence, it was obvious that Ukraine does not have full independence in solving its own problems⁷. If the French minister of foreign affairs says in 2014 that the military aggression on Ukraine means overturning the rules that have been obeyed in Europe since the Second World War, he is wrong. It is Moscow that wants the rules accepted in Teheran to be preserved, and decisions on the status of the northern hemisphere states to be taken by two superpowers and not European diplomats or voters.

We ought to remind here the chronology of the events at the beginning of 2014. After the bloodshed struggle between the Yanukovych powers and the Maidan protesters, three foreign affairs ministers, from Poland, Germany and France, arrived in Kiev. It is thanks to them that by initiating negotiations they caused the withholding of fights and the bloodshed. Yet, the agreement that was signed then cannot be judged as positive. It was signed by the opposition under the threat, which means it is not valid. It did not last for even 24 hours, which means it had not been prepared well. What is more important, it overlooked the present balance of

power in the region, i.e. the Russian interests so far. The idea that with a voting chart Ukrainians could not only change the government but also overthrow the interests of the superpowers was indeed very naive. After signing the agreement the ministers announced success and left. In their own countries they demanded prizes and praise for saving the peace, whereas actually they had put into motion the sequence of uncontrollable events. Moscow could not accept the fact that by means of voting someone would extirpate its influence from Ukraine. The new Ukrainian authorities started to work as if they had been completely independent in choosing political options⁸. In my opinion, since the new Ukrainian authorities did not comprehend international conditioning of the situation in their country it was the duty of the three ministers to make them aware of it. They did not do that, because it seems they lack the full comprehension of the world we function in. Therefore, when the new Ukrainian government announced the choice of pro-western option, that pro-European option was its priority, and that it wanted to sign the agreement with the EU, Moscow immediately started to destabilize Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. It was on the 28th February 2014 that the takeover of Crimea and Sevastopol began. On the 28th March the same year Putin signed the decree on incorporation of Crimea and Sevastopol by Russian Federation. In April 2014 separatists organized by Russia took control over Donetsk and Lughansk, de facto separating these two provinces from Ukraine. It is clearly visible that the foreign policy is not a request show, but the art of opportunities and the Moscow's harsh reaction to the geopolitical westernization of Ukraine could have been foreseen.

It is worth reminding here that voices pointing out the causes of the problem as well as possible solutions could already be heard while the crisis was developing. In Poland it was already on the 13th February 2014 that a state security specialist on Republika TV channel expressed the opinion that only neutralization of Ukraine could possibly save its territorial integrity, presenting the examples of the neutralization of Austria on the 15th May 1955 or the agreement between Russia and Finland signed in 1992. On the 24th February 2014 Z. Brzeziński wrote about the necessity of the neutralization of Ukraine as the price for preserving its territorial integrity. Alas the voices of reason, taking the balance of power into consideration, are being ignored. Among

⁷ D. Gibas-Krzak, *Ukraina między Rosją a Polską*, Toruń 2005.

⁸ *Rosja. Ukraina. Białoruś. Wybrane dylematy rozwoju*, ed. S. Gardocki, Toruń 2013.

European diplomats emotional, moralistic and legalistic attitudes prevail. Unfortunately, it means that diplomats in Europe are not familiar with the reality and base their activity on ideology, which deprives them of the influence on the reality, the real international relations. Any attempt to conduct foreign policy separated from the balance of powers is doomed to failure. Being a medium-sized and relatively weak state Ukraine can in no way struggle with the world order⁹. Neither the elections nor the new constitution can solve the main problem of Ukraine, which is the relations with superpowers, especially the closest ones. It has to be clearly stated that the West might support Ukraine, but it will not wage the war with Russia for it.

All of the above – mentioned circumstances do not mean that the West is supposed to be passive or unable to act in any way. Moscow gets its power from the western inability of taking decisions. It is now during the Ukraine situation that the West picks the fruit of the reset policy. This policy meant incorrect diagnosis concerning Russian foreign policy, which led to the significant reduction of the US forces in Europe, as well as the reduction of military budgets in the European NATO states. No wonder then that as a result of the weakening potential of the Atlantic Treaty in Europe, Moscow started expansive policy, with Georgia, Moldavia and Ukraine as examples. At the same time, the confidential negotiations between two superpowers concerning Ukraine have already taken place and they have nothing to do with so called Normandy format, in which Germany, France, Ukraine and Russia participate.

The interests of western diplomats differ from the ones of Ukrainian citizens. Representatives of Brussels aim at the accession of Ukraine to the Union in order to expand the EU economic zone. What is important for Ukraine as the nation it is to preserve the territorial integrity of the state and defend it against the dependence on other states. No European diplomat explained to the Ukrainians that it is highly advisable to take into consideration the option suggested by Brzeziński, which meant rejecting the option offered by the EU in 2013. The self-limitation of sovereignty based on own decision and accepting the neutral option without the membership in NATO and the EU but only with the agreement on economic cooperation, like in the case of Switzerland, can in no way be perceived as defeat. Therefore Ukraine has, or rather had in 2014, the choice between

neutrality and westernization, which means the long – lasting crisis and dependence on superpowers.

The situation of the lack of an alliance does not mean the isolation of the state in the world, the example being Sweden, which is active internationally. Simply speaking, the state of no alliance in case of Ukraine is not the value aimed at but the means to saving it from war, chaos, and the loss of territory. It is known that some rational arguments, e.g. ethnical, language, political¹⁰, can be presented that are in favour of the division or federalization of Ukraine. It has to be pondered over with due diligence how Ukraine could solve the problem of the Russian minority constituting one fifth of the population (inhabiting conflict area) and what might be the results of this minority weakening the Ukrainian state. Kiev faces today the same dilemma, as once did the German chancellor who was offered by Russians the unification of Germany for its neutrality. As we now know the chancellor chose smaller but free Germany. The fact that the authorities in Kiev are facing the devilish dilemma, since they must take the reality into consideration, does not mean that they are resigning from their sovereignty forever. The balance of powers in the world is not perennial, as the case of Poland shows. Nobody can predict when the window of opportunities meaning the complete independence will open for Ukraine. The Poles had been waiting for 44 years for the Russian troops to leave Poland. There are numerous signs that Ukraine will be waiting for its independence much shorter.

Brzeziński's idea was not approved of by many parties since it is a compromise which actually freezes the problem. The Ukrainians would be the ones to lose the least was such a deal to be made, since as it should be stated openly, they have never enjoyed the complete independence. The status of Switzerland may not be a dream come true, but it is much more than Ukraine has had for the last 25 years. What we are observing in the fall of 2015 ought to be referred to directly. Suggesting, during the negotiations of so called Normandy format, the truce in the situation when a part of the Ukrainian territory is occupied, in fact means embedding the Russian influence in the east of Ukraine. So the states of West Europe agree on the dependence of Ukraine on Russia. The state system of Ukraine has not been settled by the parliament in Kiev, but during the negotiations between France, Germany and Russia, when

⁹ T. Olszański, *Historia Ukrainy w XX wieku*, Warszawa 1994.

¹⁰ S. Yekelchik, *Ukraina. Narodziny nowoczesnego narodu*, Kraków 2009.

the Ukrainian delegation did not even have the status of veto players. It received the constitutional reform for unconditional and immediate approval. It had no other choice since the country was threatened with bankruptcy without the assistance of the West. How does it refer to the ambitions of the Maidan makers, is it better than the situation suggested by Brzezinski? The constitutional changes, settled with foreign politicians, were accepted by the parliament in Kiev in September 2015 under the threat of withholding the economic support. The IMF delegation did not participate in the negotiations due to the political conditions of granting the support.

Judging by the difference in reactions of the western states towards the Russian aggression on Ukraine and problems with taking decision on sanctions, it is known that the West will not introduce the doctrine of active liberation of the states enslaved by Moscow. Sanctions directed at Russia are weak, selective and did not stop Germany from signing more agreements with Gazprom in September 2015. No wonder then that according to some commentators the European solidarity with Ukraine, and generally speaking the unity of western diplomacy, has been buried by the Germans on the bottom of the Baltic Sea beside new pipelines.

The best that could happen, e.g. for many Polish politicians, was accepting by the West facing Russian aggression on Ukraine, the doctrine of withholding similar to the doctrine of Kennan. Accepting such a perspective was in no way easy due to the pro-Russian policy of Germany. The authorities in Berlin have never stated directly that Russian presence in Ukraine is aggression. This leads to ignoring problems concerning Ukraine, which de facto are the case of Russian expansion, simply ignored by Berlin. No wonder, small Greece acquired support several times larger than Ukraine, which is struggling against aggression. Hence, numerous western politicians still perceive the case of

Ukraine as some local conflict, which does not concern Europe, since it only disturbs good cooperation with Moscow. Therefore, Ukraine has not received either weapons or military assistance, and has to fight on its own. At the same time, the states involved in Normandy format make Ukraine perform concession towards the aggressor. The price Ukraine is paying for the agreement with the EU is enormous.

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