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THE ROLE OF UKRAINIAN THINK TANKS IN SHAPING OF PUBLIC OPINION ON THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION (ON THE EXAMPLE OF RAZUMKOV CENTRE AND GORSHENIN INSTITUTE)

ABSTRACT

In this article the author has explored the role of Ukrainian think tanks, notably the Razumkov Center and Gorshenin Institute, in the formation of public opinion on the European integration policy of Ukraine during the period of 2007–2013. As a result of content analysis of these analytic institutes' information materials it is concluded that the consolidated public opinion on the problem of European integration of Ukraine was not formed as Ukrainian citizens did not obtain from Ukrainian analytical structures complete, accurate and unambiguous information on this actual issue.

Key words: public opinion, think tanks, foreign policy, international relations, information influence

1. INTRODUCTION

A clear and unambiguous, consistent and pragmatic foreign policy has not been formed on the present stage of historical development of Ukraine because of inability of ruling elite, expert groups and individuals to carry out a basic and civilizational choice between the integration with the European Union or Russian Federation. It is clear that a long-term geopolitical balance between East and West is not advantageous, pragmatic and rational strategy of Ukrainian foreign policy. It increases indefinite, entropy, and turbulent position of Ukraine in the system of international relations.

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It should be stressed that selection and implementation of state foreign policy in modern conditions of informational development should receive appropriate support of citizens who should not be in an informational vacuum, being apolitical, atomized, and controversial in their political views. Unfortunately, Ukrainian public, which suffers from permanent influence of political manipulations, could not consolidate in exercising their own political choice.

It follows that *the one of the central political problem* for Ukraine is the mental choice of European integration as the main foreign policy strategy. However, on this issue, there is no univalent position of the leading ruling elite and the problem of their inability to combine Ukrainian society, scattered by ideological, mental and even socioeconomic status under the aegis of the only national idea and the uniqueness of reality perception. Thus, Ukrainian citizens, who naturally should be constituent of the state, are left outside the real political life of the country.

Based on the foregoing, there is a problem of systemic, coherent and unambiguous informational policy that needs to be implemented by the triad: state authorities, media, informational and analytical centers. These institutions are required to compile and disseminate informational and analytical data, available to the citizens of the country, providing knowledge and awareness of recent political processes in Ukraine. Following this further, the *purpose of this article* is to conduct a complex content analysis of information materials of Ukrainian think tanks and to explore their role in the formation of public opinion on the European integration strategy of Ukraine. It should be noted that Ukraine has influential analytical expertise centers, in particular *Razumkov Centre, Ukrainian Institute for Public policy, Foreign policy Research Institute and Gorshenin Institute* that have been working on the issue of Ukraine's choice of the European integration for a long time, notable from 2007 and till nowadays. Hence, the period of time from 2007 until 2013 is the chronological framework for this study.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODES

In this article the author has made an analysis of the informational material presented by two main Ukrainian think tanks on the problem of EU integration of Ukraine. For instance, one of the key informational and analytical structures, which conduct a thorough analytical and consultative support of European integration, is *Razumkov Centre* (a leading Ukrainian analytical non-governmental structure of public policy research). The Centre has released numerous analytical data entered the scientific magazine "*National Security and Defense*" and also has presented the results of the round tables, polls and expert opinions which are the information source of this research.

Another important analytical structure in the context of this article is an independent non-profit analytical research center, focused on the study of social and political processes in Ukraine and in the world – *Institute of management named after Gorshenin*, which is also engaged in informational and analytical support of European vector of Ukraine's foreign policy. Notably, the leading informational and analytical data of the Institute that has been analyzed by the author of this article are: annual programs, projects and research, analytical articles, expert forums and publication "*Gorshenin weekly*". These footage forms analytical and informational platform, accessible to Ukrainian through the Institute's website, online portal LB.ua and relevant pages in the social network Facebook. Thus, the leading search method

used by the author of this article is a content analysis of the aforementioned information material that have made an important influence on the formation of certain public opinion on the EU integration strategy of Ukraine.

3. ANALYTICAL SUPPORT OF EUROPEAN VECTOR OF UKRAINE'S FOREIGN POLICY (DURING 2007–2009)

It should be noted that the experts of such analytical structures (*Razumkov Centre and Gorshenin Institute*) have been actively engaged into informational support and monitoring of the European integration process since 2007. For example, on the eve of 2007 Razumkov Centre conducted a systematic monitoring of implementation results of the Ukraine-EU plan (2005–2007), according to which Ukraine declared EU integration as foreign policy priority. The results of researches, which included analysis of the action plan implementation, positions of the authorities on the prospects of cooperation with the EU and analysis of public opinion in the context of European integration of Ukraine, are contained in the magazine “National Security and Defense”. Basing on the experts research, conducted by the Center, it is possible to come to conclusion that positive expectations and predictions of EU integration process were dominated in 2007, namely most of the leading Ukrainian experts (62% of respondents), for example *M. Pashkov, I. Burakovskyy, O. Dergachov*, considered the integration process with the EU as a priority of foreign policy and united national idea of Ukraine. Furthermore, there was no-doubt among the experts about the possibility of Ukraine in the future to acquire the status of EU associate member. Despite that, the Razumkov Centre stressed the unsatisfactory level of transparency, realism, consistency and sensibility of the European integration policy and clarity of this foreign policy vector to the citizens of Ukraine (Report on the Assessment of the EU-Ukraine Action Plan, 2007, p. 21 – author’s translation).

The Gorshenin Institute experts led by *K. Bondarenko* conducted a study of mental foundations of Ukrainian identity relative to western or eastern thinking systems and came to the disturbing conclusion in 2007. Having analyzed the analytical data, the results of round tables and expert interviews like “*The only vector of Ukraine*” it is necessary to identify the following key political views of Ukrainian citizens on the European integration processes in 2007:

1. the stereotypes of ideological political positions of Ukrainians towards the EU and NATO;
2. ambiguity in the choice between East and West, related to the mentality schism of Ukraine;
3. prevalence desire of neutrality and balance between East and West.

Similar conclusions were also reached by experts of Razumkov Centre, which showed that public opinion regarding European integration has distinct regional specificity. Besides, the majority of citizens have expressed doubt to the ability of Ukrainian authorities to live and manage country under European rules and standards and 51% of respondents agreed with the thesis that “nobody in Europe expects Ukraine to become a part of the European Union”(Report on European integration of Ukraine, 2007, p. 51 – authors translation).

According to sociological research program of Gorshenin Institute “*Mental foundations of choice*”(2007), which became a comprehensive assessment of the degree of awareness and character of thought movement regarding the European integration of Ukraine, experts have come to the following conclusions: Ukrainians are unwilling to integrate into transnational structures of the West or East, and Russia continues to be regarded as the closest political and economic partner of Ukraine; citizens are afraid and strive for avoiding state split. Thus, Ukrainian public remained skeptical about the possibilities and prospects of Ukraine’s European integration.

Therefore, in order to ensure public consensus on European integration foreign policy in 2008, Razumkov Centre conducted an extremely important research of informational providing of country European integration process. As it was noted in the “National Security and Defense”, despite of the fact that the programs projects of informing the citizens on the European integration for 2008–2011 were implemented, Ukrainian public opinion was spontaneous, unconsolidated and contradictory on European integration vector. Notably, *A. Grytsenko* argued that “the governmental agencies are not concerned about informational provision of the European integration”(Grytsenko, 2008, p. 31 – author’s translation). Hence, Razumkov Centre in the result of carrying out round table with *R. Bogatyryova, A. Grytsenko, V. Ogryzko and B. Tarasuk* concluded that there is little state information for citizens through the media, free phone help-lines, Internet sites at portals of public authorities in Ukraine. However, in spite of the negative trends, researches showed that as in February, 2008, over 21% of respondents changed their attitude towards the EU for the better during 2007–2008 (Expert opinion on State Information Policy in the sphere of European and Euro Atlantic integration, 2008, p. 22 – author’s translation).

However, summarizing the results of the program “*Country project*” of Gorshenin Institute in 2008, aimed to analyze Ukrainian foreign political potential, based on the worldview and ideological foundations of Ukrainian society, it is necessary to emphasize the following dominant ideas of Ukrainian social and political space: Ukrainians remain uncertain about the vector of foreign policy orientation between Russia and the EU, choosing the position of state neutrality (45%). There was number decrease of respondents who linked the future of Ukraine with Russia and as a result of that, 40% of respondents advocated Ukraine’s integration into the EU in 2008.

Despite of the gradual improvements according to the polls of Razumkov Centre, citizens are poorly informed about European integration vector of Ukrainian policy. There is an acute shortage of objective and complete information about the prospects and consequences of cooperation between Ukraine and the EU in the society, for instance the vast majority (81%) of citizens believe that information about the EU is limited and incomplete (Report on the public opinion on EU-integration, 2007, p. 35 – author’s translation).

4. ANALYTICAL SUPPORT OF EUROPEAN VECTOR OF UKRAINE’S FOREIGN POLICY (DURING 2010–2011)

In 2010, to the surprise of most analysts, political scientists and ordinary Ukrainians, the new President of Ukraine *V. Yanukovich* stressed on the priority of the European foreign policy vector. The real possibility of Ukraine to sign the Association agreement with the EU

became on the agenda. Such statements, of course, caused extremely controversial discussion in expert circles. In 2010, Razumkov Centre and Gorshenin Institute have been working successfully on the informational and analytical support of our country European choice. Content-analysis of the forums, round table discussions and analytical data of these structures has showed the following key-messages and problems of the EU and Ukraine relations:

- the experts' fears (*P. Koval, V. Filipchuk, A. Ermolov*) about Ukraine's failure to fulfill all the requirements of the EU (Expert's survey on the results of EU-Ukraine Summit, 2010);
- weakness of political consensus around the European choice because of the "political turbulence" in Ukraine (Chalyi, 2010, p. 16 – author's translation);
- expectations (*A. Haran, O. Rybachuk*) of improvements in relations between Ukraine and the EU (*Expert's polls on the main zones and the prospects of relations between Ukraine and the EU on the eve of EU-Ukraine Summit*);
- the agenda of Ukraine's foreign policy – promotion towards European integration, which was accompanied by an urgent need to establish stable foreign policy of Ukraine (Expert round table Russia-Ukraine-EU: relations perspectives, 2011 – author's translation);
- the priority of Free Trade zone with the EU on affiliation to the Customs Union of Russia (*Expert round table on the question: What is more profitable for Ukraine – Free Trade zone with the EU or Russia*"), notably *I. Zhdanov* emphasis on the lack of good prospects for Ukraine for admission to the Customs Union (Zhdanov, 2010, p. 27 – author's translation).

However, opinion polls of Razumkov Centre, conducted in 2010, showed that despite of the increase of citizens' interest in 5 years (59.9%) to obtain information about the cooperation between the EU and Ukraine, the majority of respondents did not feel themselves as Europeans and belonging to the culture and history of the European community (63%) (Public opinion survey on Foreign Policy of Ukraine, 2010, p. 40 – author's translation). The instability of European integration positions of citizens was strengthened by opaque and ambiguous state informational policy (64% of respondents).

Thus, informational and analytical data analysis of Gorshenin Institute and Razumkov Centre in 2007–2011 showed that Ukrainian remained vague on the issue of European integration foreign policy course, due to the dominance of Soviet stereotypes on the eastern Ukraine, in the light of which the "western" countries are considered as a source of potential aggression and danger. On the other hand, 47% of respondents expressed a positive attitude towards signing the EU Association on the background of crisis of relations with Russia (Public opinion survey on Foreign Policy Priorities of Ukraine, 2010 – author's translation).

There has also been a growing awareness and consolidation of public opinion on the issue of European integration in 2011. For example, Gorshenin Institute popularized and discussed the following items, ideas and problems:

- the necessity to develop the own format of cooperation with the EU, the lack of understanding between the parties within the framework of the Eastern partnership (Expert survey (*Tarasuk, Rybachuk, Voloshyn*) on EU-Ukraine cooperation – author's translation);
- Russia remains the leading economic partner of Ukraine (Leshchenko, 2011 – author's translation);

- the priority of European policy vector, forming Free Trade zone with the EU to acquire the status of an associate member in accordance with the polls of *V. Chalyi* and *I. Zhdanov* (Expert survey on question: What is profitable for Ukraine – forming Free Trade zone with the EU or joining the Customs Union with Russia, 2011 – author’s translation);
- Ukraine cannot become the part of the Eurasian Union as Ukraine belongs to the European mental and cultural space according to *O. Voloshyn* (Expert round table on question: Will Ukraine become the part of the Eurasian Union, 2011 – author’s translation);
- the prospects ambiguity of relations between Ukraine and Russia in the case of the Free Trade zone forming with the EU (Expert round table on: Ukraine-Russia relations: closest perspective, 2011 – author’s translation).

5. ANALYTICAL SUPPORT OF EUROPEAN VECTOR OF UKRAINE’S FOREIGN POLICY (DURING 2012–2013)

The 2012–2013 became the culmination years of the European integration debates among Ukrainian leaders, leading analysts and the general public. The problem of the European integration choice was actively explored by the Razumkov Centre experts, who has dedicated *the magazine’s issue № 4–5 “National Security and Defense”* to the problems of EU-Ukraine-Russia relations. The central question of the issue was the contradiction and complexity of relations between Kyiv, Brussels and Moscow, connected with a high level of confidence crisis and conflicts of interests.

Having analyzed the round table with *O. Bilorus, V. Lytvyn, B. Tarasiuk, I. Sharov* conducted by Razumkov Centre it is concluded that the experts discussion was concentrated on the following problems: low efficiency level of V. Yanukovich’s policy on the European integration; the importance of maintaining the partnership relations with Russia as a part of implementing the successful policy of European integration; inadmissibility of deepening “pro-Russian part” of Ukraine’s foreign policy; danger of the division of Ukraine; inability of foreign policy balancing between East and West. What is equally important – the expert poll showed that 82% of Ukrainian experts advocate the necessity to move towards the EU in 2013. Similar attitudes and concerns were expressed by Gorshenin Institute experts in the framework of the program “*Ukrainian prospects of European integration*”, which showed: 83% of those surveyed experts believed that Ukraine will not be able in the next 2–3 years to move from multi-vector foreign policy to the one-way vector, choosing the direction of European integration of foreign policy as leading. In addition to that, the content-analysis of analytical data has demonstrated that the central problems and issues dominated in the ruling, expert and public opinion on the European vector of foreign policy for 2012–2013, were:

1. The economic problem, especially the energy security of Ukraine and the potential conflicts between Ukraine and the EU (Severin, 2012 – author’s translation).
2. According to *O. Leshchenko* there was a strong political relations conflict with the EU and Russia (Leshchenko, 2013 – author’s translation).

3. The crisis of confidence between Ukraine and the EU and the improbability of the Association signing with the EU according to *V. Chalyi* (Expert round table on Ukraine and the EU: Is there a common future, 2012 – author’s translation).

Besides, several expert forums, conducted by Gorshenin Institute in 2013 played central role in shaping of public opinion on the European integration issues. For example, leading Ukrainian and foreign politicians, experts have tried to analyze and predict the foreign agenda for Ukraine for 2013 in the process of realization of such projects as “*Ukraine-2013. International relations*”; “*Ukraine-2013. Agenda*”; “*Ukraine-2013. The political outlook*”. However, there were unconsolidated views and opinions towards the issues of European integration, summarizing them we can admit that the only united opinion on this matter has not been made.

Consequently, it is possibly to affirm that the decentralization of public opinion on the European vector has been noticeable during 2012–2013 which led to Ukraine’s mental split. For instance, 40% of respondents advocated the fact that relations with the EU should be a priority for Ukraine, while relations with Russia were supported by 35% in February, 2012 (Public opinion survey on: Which vector of foreign policy should be a priority for Ukraine, 2012 – author’s translation). Therefore, in order to consolidate public opinion, Razumkov Centre, supported by the International foundation “*Renaissance*”, published the booklet untitled “*Ukraine: time of choice*” aimed to inform the average citizen about possible geopolitical steps of Ukraine, including the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU or joining the Customs Union ruled by Russia. The booklet contained not only clear, consistent and accessible information on the advantages and disadvantages of Ukraine’s movement certain direction, but also reflected the results of the expert focus groups, opinion polls. The main purpose of this project was to inform citizens for overcoming stereotypes, myths and clichés that impeded unbiased, reasonable and unambiguous geopolitical choice of Ukrainian citizens.

6. CONCLUSION

Summing up, it should be noted that although the informational and analytical activities of Razumkov Center and Gorshenin Institute were directed to shift of public opinion, search of values and positions compromise, most discussions, analytical and expert assessments were ambiguous in nature and were difficult to the understanding of contemporary international agenda for Ukraine.

Thus, despite of the rather lively experts’ discussion of European integration vector of Ukraine’s foreign policy, reinforced by the possibility of Ukraine’s signing *the Association agreement at summit in Vilnius in November, 28–29, 2013*, Ukraine has not developed as a full subject of international relations and political leadership has failed to establish a constructive relationship on parity with their citizens, having a positive effect on public opinion. Instead, informational and analytical centers have not become an effective instrument for analytical support of important government decisions, and creator of consolidated public opinion. In general, the process of European integration debate of foreign policy has been “behind the scenes” and controversial. In this context, it is reasonable an opinion of the director of Kyiv Gorshenin Institute *K. Bondarenko*, who said that there is a fundamental problem for Ukraine that “we still cannot understand what government we have – federal or unitary, and which country we are – maritime or continental, European or Eurasian” (Bondarenko, 2007, p. 3 – author’s translation). Unfortunately, very often, the idea of European integration has

become a manipulative tool of ordinary citizens' consciousness and public opinion defragmentation. Hence, the inconsistency of informational policy caused the formation of the "informational vacuum" initiated by the "mosaic" and fragmentary knowledge of Ukrainians, lack of the national idea, mentality and historical heterogeneity and as a result of that the acute crisis of Ukraine's internal and foreign policy.

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