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UKRAINE: BUILDING INTERNAL STABILITY

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Ukraine continues to be trapped in its long statelessness. The historical errors that were made by the country's national elite are often listed among the reasons why the national state is not valued. A postcolonial syndrome is also among them. Still, Ukraine need not abandon its history, but rather formulate an approach towards critical historical events. Today there is a lack of understanding of the national interest as the basis for internal stability, although defining the national interest is the basis for survival. This article looks at what are Ukraine's national interests, who should define them, and how they might be formulated. How sufficient is the level of awareness of the national interests among the national elite? How can these interests be implemented? What can be done to make Ukraine resilient?

(Un)awareness of National Interests

In December 2017, Estonian Foreign Minister Sven Mikser stated, "Lack of internal stability prevents Ukraine from focusing on important reforms." He added that Tallinn, together with other European partners, was ready to help Kyiv find a solution to its many pressing issues.¹ This statement was particularly aimed at the country's domestic politics, but it equally describes one of the key obstacles on Ukraine's path of democratic reforms and transformations.

Mikser's comment raised some key points regarding internal stability and the national interest in maintaining it. How might stability be maintained without putting limitations on political activity? Who might

stand for Ukrainian national interests? Who should define them? Could outside reform experts be helpful in building the Ukraine of our dreams? What procedures might protect the state from failure and make Ukraine more resilient? How might Ukrainians ensure the durability of their government and make bureaucracy a guarantor of stability, rather than a barrier to it?

Path of (In)dependence

Ukraine continues to be trapped by its long statelessness and the failures of state- and nation-building during the 20th century. Some historians and political experts speak of a postcolonial syndrome.² If Ukraine suffers from postcolonial syndrome, it must have been a colony, more specifically,

1 Україні потрібна внуtrішня стабільність, щоб сфокусуватися на реформах. [Ukraine needs internal stability to concentrate on reforms], [<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news/28909352.html>] access: 31 May 2021].

2 See, for instance, Матеріали третьої Міжнародної науково-практичної конференції 4-5 квітня 2014 року, м. Львів «Геноцид України у ХХ столітті. Україна під окупаційними режимами: історичні реалії та постколоніальний синдром». Львів, 2015; Рябчук, М. Постколоніальний синдром. Спостереження, 2011.

a Russian colony. Curiously, that point is still being debated. For example, Stanislav Kulchutskyi claims that Ukraine could be regarded as a colony only at the time of Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky, when the state was in the process of being established and Russia subsumed it instead.³ When analysing Russian-Ukrainian relations during the 19th and 20th centuries, we see that Russian authorities and even some Ukrainians did not separate Ukraine from Greater Russia, so how could Ukraine be called a colony?⁴



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Some experts argue that the real problem lay in the critical role that historical errors and poor decisions played in the state-building process. For example, agreeing to give up the third largest nuclear arsenal in the world in 1994, a flawed approach to military and defence policy, or lack of attention to Ukrainian cities during the liberation struggle of 1917-1921. They prefer thinking in "what if..." mode, rather than analysing

the existing situation. No nation could have managed its way without mistakes and Ukraine is no exception.

Moreover, there are much more pronounced historical events that determine the specific way of that Ukraine has developed. Firstly, Ukrainians had minimal opportunities to develop a national culture and political institutions. Russian imperial policy throughout the 19th and 20th centuries led to the russification of the local population and other imperial pressures channelled economic resources to build and support the imperial economy, denying the right to be an autonomous nation. Instead, Ukrainians were treated as an ethnographic offshoot of a single Russian nation. Ukraine's national elites had an uneasy choice: to face repressions for starting or maintaining nation-building projects or to accept the Russian empire's rules. Some chose empire, and others chose to develop a sense of national identity and struggle for their nation's independence.^{5 6}

History as Weapon

Meanwhile, arguments over whether Ukraine was a Russian colony or not should not miss the danger that Russia represents. After all, after seven years of hybrid aggression, 6% of Ukrainians still think that Ukraine and Russia should have been united in one state.⁷ Ukrainians need to strengthen political independence from Russia and overcome the forms of dependence

3 *Виховання голодом. Станіслав Кульчицький про причини і наслідки Голодомору* [Upbringing by Hunger. Stanislav Kulchutsky about reasons and consequences of Holodomor], 27 November 2020. [https://zaxid.net/vihovannya_golodom_n1511218 access: 31 May 2021].

4 Кульчицький, С. Чи була Україна російською колонією в царські і радянські часи? [Has Ukraine been a Russian colony in Tsar and Soviet times?], [in:] Academia. Terra Historiae. Студії на пошану Валерія Смолія. – К., 2020. – С.583-594.

5 Fedor, H., Belarus: A Country Study. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1995.

6 Plokhy, S., *Lost Kingdom: A History of Russian Nationalism from Ivan the Great to Vladimir Putin*. Allen Lane Publishing, 2017.

7 Ставлення населення України до Росії та населення Росії до України, лютий 2021 року [Attitude of Ukrainian citizens towards Russia, and attitude of Russian citizens towards Ukraine, February 2021], [<https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=1015&page=1> access 14 July 2021].

inherited from the past that have not been fully eliminated over the last three decades: economic, psychological and informational.

In this sense, it is impossible to overestimate the role of history in any nation's development and survival, so it is not surprising that Ukrainian national history has become a target in the hybrid war. History policy is one of the key elements of Russia's hybrid aggression against Ukraine. Some key messages are: Ukrainians are an artificial nation, Ukraine does not have the right to exist, Ukrainians are judeophobes and collaborated with the Nazis regime, and they were responsible for some episodes of the Holocaust. These claims are neither new nor unfamiliar, but nowadays, there is clear reason to consider them a part of informational and hybrid aggression.

How to counter this challenge? The past is impossible to forget, and it affects our lives, our visions and our coping strategies. Of course, it is also impossible to avoid its influence in international politics. Historians should discuss the painful areas of Ukrainian history. Historical traumas should be re-thought and re-lived, but not re-written. Every nation has its successes and failures during its history. On-and-off statehood during the 20th century is hardly Ukraine's problem alone, and when it came, independence did not fall from the sky on Ukrainians. The goal today should be to learn how to draw conclusions from historical events and processes, including those that are unpleasant for Ukrainians, such as the Holocaust or the Volyn tragedy, and not to try to re-write history in a more acceptable way. Ukrainians need not abandon their history, but they do need to formulate an approach to key historical events. These can become the drivers for a positive perception of statehood.

Let's start with the fact that Ukrainian elites participated in the empire-building and development of Russia. That caused

problems in nation-building and national self-consciousness. The formation of a political nation continues today, but under the strong influence of objective factors, such as Russia's hybrid aggression, and the subjective visions and evaluations of external players.



It is impossible to overestimate the role of history in any nation's development and survival, so it is not surprising that Ukrainian national history has become a target in the hybrid war

In the 30 years of its independence, the most prolonged period in the history of Ukrainian statehood, the political system and society have undergone three revolutions. That suggests that the country's democratic institutions are working poorly. Ukraine is still a country in transition and this seems to be an alarming signal.

The Maidan Was Good, But Not the Answer

What are the critical lessons of the three Ukrainian revolutions? First, revolutionary activity in Ukraine has taken place too often. Second, the peaceful nature of the Granite and Orange Revolutions determined the bloody scenario that ended the Revolution of Dignity. In the end, not one revolution's victory established the irreversibility of social and political changes in Ukraine. Thirdly, Ukraine has turned out to be the most revolution-minded of all the post-Soviet republics – evidence of tectonic changes in Ukrainian society. Nevertheless, even the brief analysis of the key events of the last three decades shows that revolutionary changes appear to be over. A fourth revolution could threaten the territorial integrity and effective development of Ukraine.

The state of Ukraine stood steadfast in the whirlwind of revolutionary events and continued to maintain foreign subjectivity. This suggests that revolutions had a positive effect on the Ukrainian state. Yet, Ukrainians as a political nation continue to lack consolidation around national interests as the basis of internal stability.

The revolutionary mood and changes it brought did not lead to a clear, rapid shaping of the country's national interests. Sadly enough, only the start of Russian aggression pushed the discussion towards the future of the state, to the question, what Ukraine do Ukrainians want to see over the next few years? This conversation will not be easy and cannot be reduced to elections alone. It has to take place. The definition of national interests, mechanisms for ranking and updating them, and open debate of these issues are the basis for national survival and can only strengthen Ukraine as a state.

Realizing its revolutionary evolution, the peak acceleration of movement towards European values, the restoration of territorial integrity and sovereignty, the deoligarchization of the economy based on the principle of the inviolability of private property, the building of a powerful army, the creation of an attractive image, and the completion of European and Euro-Atlantic integration – are all these part of the Ukrainian dream? Do Ukrainians understand European integration as a key national interest? The issues must be discussed.

The image of a state where revolutions are the only way to move forward is one possible image of Ukraine, but it is an image that is harmful to the country. The electoral process and public oversight must be improved to increase trust between state and society

when developing an effective strategic communications system.

A specific triad is the driving force behind a national security system: national values, national interests and national goals. As Volodymyr Horbulin noted,



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[The] elements of the triad for all their importance and unconditional relationships are not equivalent. In their hierarchy, the first place belongs to national values as the least mobile and most stable system element. These values are formed during the historical process. The development of the material and spiritual culture of a society corresponds to the geopolitical direction of the country. National interests are a relatively dynamic element that is formed based on national values under the influence of long-term trends in social development. National goals are the most mobile element. They are determined by national interests, taking into account the domestic and international situation.⁸

Structuring national interests is a long, steady process in a complex historical

8 Чернятевич, Я. Формування економічної політики держави у контексті забезпечення національної безпеки [Y. Chernyachevych, Formation of Economic policy of the state in the context of the national security] [in:] Національні цінності й національні інтереси в системі публічного управління. – К., 2017., с. 175-178.

combination of economic, political, social, national-psychological, cultural, and other factors. That is why national interests are inextricably linked to their bearers: the people and their history. They have the closest relationship with the self-determination of a particular nation, with the formation of national statehood that is appropriate to a particular nation's forms and political and legal environment, and the norms of world development.

Anniversary on The Edge: Defining National Interests

Thirty years of independence have resulted in visible changes in the understanding and manifestation of Ukraine's national interests. The key result of these transformations is growing internal stability, internal consensus, and subjectivity in international relations. However, the challenges facing the Ukrainian state today sometimes raise unpleasant, difficult questions.

Some key points might help to define Ukrainian national interests:

- *Achieving peace and restoring territorial integrity* – the leading national interest in terms of scale and time. All others, including European integration and NATO membership, are derivatives and the instruments for achieving the main goal.
- *Eliminating Soviet traditions and elements of Soviet culture* – in particular, establishing national achievements for key anniversaries, such as 30 years of independence.
- *Focusing on process*, as process is sometimes more important than the result. And this is true for the democratic and sustainable development.
- *Preserving the democratic nature of the Ukrainian state* – and strengthening meaningful competition is the key to its development.

- *Having a clear plan for Baltic-Black Sea integration*, especially as Ukraine could become a regional leader in this part of Europe.
- *Investing in the military* – Ukraine is destined to increase military spending and qualitatively improve its defensive organization. Clearly, Russian threats and aggressions are not going to disappear at once or soon. One of the key lessons the 1917-1921 national liberation struggles that should be definitely remembered in the 21st century is to keep strengthening the Armed Forces of Ukraine.
- *Working to reduce the values gap* – European and Euro-Atlantic integration is not a mere slogan for election campaigning but a modus operandi in overcoming the gap with the region's countries. The values gap is not an easy gap to overcome.
- *Supporting a healthy middle class* – Ukraine needs not a symbolic deoligarchization but effective support for establishing a national bourgeoisie. This term may sound old-fashioned in the 21st century but its substance is the foundation for national economic stability and solid ground for the national business community.
- *Developing Ukraine's historical narrative* – This will always come under pressure from the narratives of other states in the modern world – Poland, Russia, Romania and Turkey are the closest and the most powerful in the region. It should be taken into consideration, that some of these narratives have vestiges of imperial thinking and some are effectively hybrid aggression.
- *Increasing energy independence and diversifying energy supplies* – This is partly a component of conflicted relations with Russia but it is also a guarantee of economic growth for Ukraine for upcoming years.

- *Improving media literacy and critical thinking* – This is especially critical in socio-political discourse. State support for such campaigns and initiatives is critical.

Henry John Temple, the 3rd Viscount Palmerston, made a speech in the House of Commons in 1848 in which he stated, “We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow.”⁹ Despite its age, this quotation undoubtedly remains relevant today.

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⁹ Lord Palmerston 1784–1865. British statesman; Prime Minister, 1855–8, 1859–65. [https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191866692.001.0001/q-orc-ed6-00008130 access: 31 May 2021].



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