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Problem Pages of History and Development Prospects in the International Space of Ukraine and the Republic of Poland

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Abstract

In the article, the authors reviewed the main areas of cooperation between Ukraine and the Republic of Poland, highlighted the problematic points and prospects for the further development of bilateral relations of these states in the future. The reasons for the aggravation of the international relationships of the two countries are clearly marked, which mainly boil down to historical conflicts. This obvious problem lies in the different views of the two countries on the tragic past and political history. But the authors analyzed an equally important issue of migration and employment, national consciousness and domestic issues, issues of border and visa-free regime. It was determined that the problem partially also lies in the fact that in the past, trust between states was lost and so far the parties are not able to establish communication to solve these problems. It is proved that this crisis period should not be perceived as the termination of interconnections, but only as an indicator of the development and dynamics of relations between states.

Keywords: International relations, Volyn tragedy, OUN, UPA, “Revolution of dignity”, party “Law and Justice”, labor emigration, xenophobia, genocide, national consciousness, visa-free regime, investments, European Union, integration.

International relations of Ukraine and the Republic of Poland include cooperation in the field of international politics, European integration, economics, education, science, culture, and so forth. Historically, Ukraine and Poland have a lot in common. First of all, this is a strategic partnership and geopolitical neighborhood of these states. Ukrainian-Polish cooperation is based on the unity of views on the future of Europe. Relations between Poland and Ukraine have a complicated history. From the 1990s to 2015, relations between the two countries were generally positive. Poland supported Ukraine’s application for acces-

sion to the European Union and supported Kiev during the political crisis in 2014. But in 2015, the tension between them began to grow.

In our view, history should cease to be a problem in Polish-Ukrainian relations after the fall of communism. In the 1990s, the Polish political elite made a conscious decision, limiting their perseverance in relations with Ukrainian partners, focusing on their own mistakes. On the Polish side, almost every crime committed against the Ukrainian people by the institutions of the Polish state (including the communist state) was directly named and condemned either in the form of a parliamentary bill (the Sejm), or a presidential statement. The crimes in Jaworzno were convicted by Aleksander Kwasniewski, and the crimes in Pavolomi were condemned by Lech Kaczynski. Although in Ukraine, even the compromise draft law on the anniversary of the Volyn tragedy of 2003 (without naming the guilty people) caused objections.

In 2014, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, after refusing to sign an association agreement between Ukraine and the EU, actually betrayed the interests of the Ukrainian people and, therefore, left our state. Since that moment, two parts of the history of Ukraine were elevated to the top in Ukrainian politics, and both were used as symbols of the Ukrainian resistance and its struggle for independence. The first part, the Holodomor, famine was artificially arranged by the Soviet authorities in the early 1930s, which killed millions of Ukrainians and was intended to eliminate the independence movement of Ukraine. The second part of our history is the militarized Ukrainian Insurgent Army and Stepan Bandera, the leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. Both groups were involved in the massacre of the Poles in Volyn and Eastern Galicia, two regions that at that time split between Poland and Western Ukraine, during the Nazi occupation of Poland. After the end of World War II, a significant part of Volyn and Eastern Galicia became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and Poland became a Soviet satellite state. Since both states, to varying degrees, were ruled by Moscow, it became necessary to reduce the differences between Poles and Ukrainians and censor any discussion of the killing of Poles in Volyn and Eastern Galicia and other similar events. Only after the Ukrainians began to recognize Stepan Bandera as a national hero, these crimes became the center of a heated argument between the two states. In Poland, these events formed the basis of the plots of books, films and political debates, in 2016 the Polish parliament unanimously approved the law, which declared that the events of the Volyn tragedy are genocide. In February, Warsaw adopted a law by which the denial of the crime of UPA actions committed against the Poles in the period between 1925 and 1950 is considered as a crime (Fridman, Colibasan).

The revival of these historical events should be viewed in the wider context of the growth of nationalism in both states. In Poland, the nationalist protests were partly a response to the policies imposed by the EU and its de facto Ger-

man leader. The requirement of the EU that the members of the union should accept the resettlement of refugees after a massive influx of migrants to Europe led to appeals in Poland for the country to make its own way. In 2015, the “Law and Justice” party came to power in Poland, which campaigned on a nationalist platform. Nationalist parties such as the National Movement and the National Radical Camp have become more active and even supported by some supporters of the “Law and Justice Party”. During this period, a number of nationalist groups and parties emerge in Ukraine, including the Public Association “Freedom”, the National Corps, the Right Sector, and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. Ukrainian nationalism, which spread after the revolution of the “Revolution of Dignity” helps to resist in the fight against Russian aggression and influence in the eastern parts of the country (Kuliksky, 2018).

The largest nationalist protests in both states took place last fall, when tens of thousands took part in a demonstration in Kiev and Warsaw. In Kiev, the demonstrators celebrated the 75th anniversary of the organization of the UPA. In Warsaw, some protesters celebrated Independence Day. In February, Polish demonstrators gathered in front of the Ukrainian Embassy in Warsaw, demanding to limit the support of Ukraine for events and people associated with the UPA. In March, Ukrainians gathered in front of the Polish embassy in Kiev in protest against Polish law, which sets the punishment for denying crimes committed against the Poles almost a century ago. Also last year, several monuments to victims of Polish crimes and a Polish memorial cemetery in Lviv in Western Ukraine were subjected to acts of vandalism. In April 2017, Kiev banned the exhumation of the Poles killed during World War II, and later this year Warsaw refused the answer to the chairman of the Commemorative Committee of Ukraine, with the same question. The protests were held on an “eye for an eye” basis, which is unacceptable in a conscious democratic society.

Border is another problem of relations between states. The introduction of a visa-free regime in the EU and a large number of Ukrainian tourists to Poland leads to the fact that the number of people crossing the border is constantly increasing. EU allocates funds to Ukraine to improve border infrastructure with Poland.

Unfortunately, the roads connecting Poland and Ukraine have still not improved, although rail and air connections are increasing. This is another factor in the worsening of relations between states. Even taking into account that the majority of social tensions are caused by historical events, solving problems in the border regions and improving the situation at least at the local level can bring significant benefits to both states (Grabowski, 2004).

Another factor that complicates the border problem is the migration of Ukrainians to Poland and the socio-economic consequences of this for the Poles. Migration of Ukraine to Poland has been growing since 2014 and this is the larg-

est wave of migration in the modern history of Poland, according to national statistics. Most of them stay in Poland, increasing the significance of the Ukrainian diaspora, although xenophobic conflicts are not uncommon (Berdykhovskaya, 2005). First of all, we still know very little about each other. It is necessary to promote better integration between the Poles and the Ukrainians. According to a report published by the Polish Human Resources Service Work Service in December 2017, about 2 million Ukrainians worked in Poland at the end of 2017, having increased by only 1,000,000 over the year (in 2016 – 3 million). Ukrainian citizens most often fill jobs that are not filled by Polish citizens, and usually their work is paid less than Polish workers, although in general wages increased by 20–30% in 2017 compared to 2016. In this case, in Poland, there should be a problem of accessibility of jobs for the citizens of the state themselves. But Poland still needs more workers to support its growing economy. During the same period, a large number of Poles dissatisfied with the conditions and wages emigrated to the western more developed EU countries. Tens of thousands of Ukrainians who choose Poland to study or work accept this country with its strengths and weaknesses. They do not participate in political-historical conflicts. Most of them are surprised to learn that our states are experiencing a crisis in interstate relations. This is an essential part of the question, because it is these people who represent the future of Polish-Ukrainian relations. And in course of time, the situation with insufficient awareness, misunderstanding and hostility will change. Increasing the number of people involved in public relations between Ukraine and Poland, mutual knowledge and understanding of each other will contribute to the positive development of this issue (Pavlenko, 2002).

After the “Revolution of Dignity”, Ukraine received more “windows to Europe” and hoped to improve and develop strong relations with the states that participated in the Minsk ceasefire negotiations, these are France, Germany, and the United States. Namely, the importance of Poland as a state-conductor of Ukraine in the EU has decreased. But in the end, the current tensions will not change the fact that Poland needs Ukraine as an ally and vice versa. In fact, cooperation between the two states in military matters was increased in 2017, and their economic ties, including trade and investment, remained consistent (Cossack).

In this way, tensions are indicators of internal pressure facing the two governments, not indications of changes in policy or strategy. Both governments led nationalist platforms, and when events in another state caused nationalist protests and coups in their constituencies, they had to respond. In geopolitics, it is necessary to focus on the big picture, and political rhetoric is not always important. There is only one situation in which rhetoric can be permissible: when it involves national dignity and how a nation defines itself. That is why the rhetoric in this case had such a powerful effect. But it is likely that both countries can hold off the growth of nationalism in such a way that it does not affect the rela-

tions between them, despite the acts and vandalism that may arise. Both governments must take a tough stance on this issue, working together to strengthen military ties and ensure that Russia does not extend its influence further west.

So, we will know and understand each other better if we consider our relations not only from the historical past. In our opinion, it is necessary to study modern Poland and modern Ukraine, which are connected on a real basis and common interests. Good neighborly relations between Ukraine and Poland will contribute to the development of the potential of both countries and the expansion of influence in a united Europe.

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