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**UKRAINE AND EU ENLARGEMENT
ITALIAN ASSOCIATION OF UKRAINIAN STUDIES
NAPLES, NOVEMBER 2002**

The borders of the European Union and Europe do not currently coincide nor will they do so after the EU's next eastern enlargement. What should be the relations between the EU and the rest of Europe, the so-called Wider Europe?

The answer to the question is compounded by the fact that the Wider Europe comprises the states, such as Russia, Moldova, Albania, Ukraine, Macedonia and Belarus, which have indicated widely different aspirations vis-a-vis the Union.

Largely owing to the challenges of deepening integration, the internal reforms and enlargement, until present the question of the Wider Europe has been scantily addressed, with the notable exception of the Western Balkans.

This ambivalence left the country like Ukraine in an uncomfortable limbo, because of its persistent seeking of closer ties with the Union.

In 1996, an explicit intention to join the EU was firstly voiced, and, in June 1998, a strategy on Ukraine's integration with the European Union was adopted, formally establishing Ukraine's membership in the EU as a long-term strategic goal. A more detailed program for Ukraine's integration with the EU was adopted in September 2000. Since then Ukraine has repeatedly articulated its overarching objective – the membership of the European Union.

However, the Union has so far been reluctant to address the issue of relations with Ukraine, considering the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (which came into force in 1998 and is due for renewal by 2008) as the appropriate and sufficient framework for future relations.

Mindful of the precedent set by relations with Turkey, the EU has been unwilling to acknowledge any prospect of membership for a country as large and economically and politically ramshackle as Ukraine.

The relative lack of long-term commitment, comprehensive strategy and any clearly articulated goal on the part of the EU in its relations with Ukraine has been exposed in the paucity of the assistance it has provided. The total of €190 million handed over 2001 is relatively small, especially in comparison to the levels of funding allocated to candidate states such as Poland, and reflects the limited role Tacis funding plays in stimulating a 'European choice' in Ukraine.

Indeed, Ukraine has done a lot to undermine the credibility of its own intentions. Ukraine's pro-European declarations have not so far been matched by deeds as evidenced by stuttering economic and political reforms. The 'stop and go' pattern of economic reforms, combined with the marked regress in democratisation since late 1990s, and the massive scale of social depravation moulded the image of Ukraine as a 'basket case' and 'post-Soviet failure'.

At the same time, Ukraine has remained a kind of 'boring' issue: it has not experienced the type of conflict or crises that characterised several countries in south-east Europe, something which, ironically, would most likely push Ukraine up the EU's agenda.

Notwithstanding official declarations by Ukrainian foreign policy officials, the 'European choice' barely features in the domestic political debate and does not inform policy-making in Kyiv. Even though few are overtly opposed to it, it lacks staunch support.

While none of Ukraine's political forces objects to closer ties with Europe, nor is any of them committed and/or strong enough to implementing the reforms necessary to enable the country to approach membership of the EU.

Most pro-European officials can be found in the ministry of foreign affairs. The ministry has attempted to 'westernize' Ukraine almost unaided in so far as external relations are concerned, even though real power resides with the presidential administration, which has favoured a more 'traditional' Ukrainian foreign policy strategy, namely a multi-vectored approach characterized by

numerous ‘strategic partnerships’. The rest of the Ukrainian bureaucracy remains ambiguous about, and even suspicious of, integration with the EU.

Ukrainian society in general also remains to be convinced of its ‘European vocation’. According to opinion polls, one-third of the population is pro-European, a proportion – a similar proportion to that which supports Ukraine’s reintegration with Russia or the CIS.

In fact, many people appear to favour the simultaneous strengthening of ties with Russia/the CIS *and* Europe, a stance which the Ukrainian political scientist Mykola Riabchuk attributes to a profoundly ambivalent post-Soviet consciousness.ⁱ Ukrainian society at large is thus either woefully ignorant, indifferent or ill-informed about European integration.

Yet, the imminence of enlargement gives urgency to the task of overcoming the current impasse in the EU-Ukrainian relations, especially as enlargement itself compounds the challenges, especially when it comes to the free movement of people.

The removal of barriers to the movement of people between the former Soviet Union and its satellites in central and eastern Europe in the early 1990s was one of the main benefits of the ending of the Cold War.

For the best part of its existence, the Soviet Union prohibited free travel for ordinary citizens between its republics and its communist satellite states.

The EU’s objective of developing its ‘area of freedom, security and justice’ requires the Union to secure its external border. Because Ukraine is viewed by the EU almost exclusively through the prism of ‘soft’ security threats, emanating both from the country itself and through its still permeable eastern frontiers, the EU’s new external border after enlargement will be ‘hard’ indeed, when it comes to Ukraine.ⁱⁱ

As it stands, from the perspective of the average traveller, the Polish-Ukrainian border is ‘unfriendly but open’. Crossing the border tends to be a rather unpleasant and often a deeply humiliating experience, but at least there are few bureaucratic hurdles.

From next year, the border is likely to become ‘friendlier but closed’, in the sense that it will be ‘civilized’ by Schengen rules, but relatively closed for ordinary citizens because of the time-consuming bureaucratic hurdles and expense of getting a visa.

The EU is keen to propagate its external frontiers as ‘borders of opportunities and co-operation’ but in practice, previous instances when visas were introduced hardly inspire confidence.

Slovakia, for example, introduced visas for Ukraine in 2000. This resulted in a five-fold reduction of border traffic in the following year - from 1.7 million people to 0.3 million people.ⁱⁱⁱ

The visa regime will spell an end to the unique area of free movement of people, within a visa-free zone that has existed in Central and Eastern Europe since the collapse of communism.

Returning to the starting point of my presentation, the visa regime will simply restore the *status quo ante* of the Soviet era, when the movement of people was tightly restricted.

One cannot but endorse the view of professor Osadczuk who argued:

‘What did we struggle with communism for exactly?! For the free flow of people and ideas – this was the motto of the West and under this flag it won the war with communism. But now [the West] shifts to the position of communism, which separated itself.’^{iv}

Thus, if for countries like Poland, Slovakia and Hungary enlargement is basically about inclusion, for Ukraine, as things stand, it represents exclusion.

The creation of a new barrier of movement will threaten the economic interdependence of border regions, jeopardise people’s livelihoods and, frustrate the task of reducing growing socio-economic disparities between Poland and Ukraine.

While the end of the Cold War gave a blow to the dividing line in Europe - the ‘iron curtain’, the current EU enlargement does not amount to a completion

of its abolition, rather it seems to shift that line several hundred kilometres eastward.

But while proclaiming the aim of developing good-neighbourly relations after the next round of enlargement, the EU has paid scant attention to the negative external effects of enlargement on its immediate neighbours and hence has yet not addressed the challenges arising from it.

Although the overall effects of enlargement is widely expected to be positive for east-central Europe, this 'benign neglect' of Ukraine on the part of the EU is not conducive to good neighbourly relations and is hardly compatible with EU values.

A more coherent and durable basis for the relations with Ukraine needs to be established as a matter of urgency in order to, in the short-term, firstly, mitigate the negative consequences of enlargement and thereby counteract the deepening sense of exclusion, with all its ramification for the new division line in Europe, and, secondly, in the longer term, to enable the EU to extend its constructive influence, that has been so successfully exercised over the east-central Europe, beyond its new eastern border, to the countries such as Ukraine.

The re-thinking of the relations with the Wider Europe was embarked in 2002. A joint paper titled 'Wider Europe', written by Christopher Patten of the European Commission and Javier Solana, the EU's foreign policy and security chief, outlines ideas for the EU's relations with its future neighbors. Ukraine is singled out as meriting 'a more concrete recognition of [its] European aspiration', yet, significantly, 'without closing any options for the more distant future'. The paper proposes that Ukraine and Moldova be offered a new form of 'proximity agreements' accompanied by a new kind of 'proximity instrument', which would overcome the limitations of the Tacis program.

The chances are that Ukraine, in particular, will be disappointed by 'Wider Europe'. Despite the positive stance of the document, anything short of acknowledging Ukraine's prospect for EU membership tends to be seen by Kyiv as a distinctly second-best option serving only to intensify Ukraine's suspicion that the EU takes a real interest only in countries that it sees as future members.

i Mykola Riabchuk, 'Bycie "między", czyli ambiwalencja społeczna i narodowa przyczyną niekonsekwentnej polityki wewnętrznej i międzynarodowej', in Stegner (ed.), *Wschód-Zachód. Ukraina*, pp. 138–46.

ⁱⁱ See Heather Grabbe, *The Sharp Edges of Europe: Security Implications of Extending EU Border Policies Eastwards*, occasional paper no. 13 (London: Institute of Strategic Studies/Western European Union, 2000).

ⁱⁱⁱ Information obtained from Alexander Duleba, Slovakia Foreign Policy Association, Presov. See also *Natsionalna Bezpeka i Oborona*, no. 11 (23), 2001, p. 26.

^{iv} *Nowe Państwo*, 2 Feb. 2001.