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COOPERATION BETWEEN UKRAINE AND THE BALTIC STATES IN THE FIELD OF SECURITY AND DEFENSE AFTER 2014

The article examines Ukraine's partnership with the Baltic States in the field of security and defense in the context of the escalation in the regional security environment caused by the aggressive policy of the Russian Federation. Sources of deepening Ukrainian-Baltic cooperation and factors influencing its potential for stable development are identified. The role of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia as advocates of Ukrainian interests in the international arena is analyzed. The practical aspects of the interstate Ukrainian-Baltic partnership in the areas that affect Ukraine's defense capabilities are also studied. The thesis about the strategic relations of Ukraine with the Baltic States in terms of general positioning in the international arena is confirmed, as well as Lithuania's role as a strategic partner of Ukraine in the Baltic-Black Sea region.

Keywords: strategic partnership, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, military cooperation, Baltic-Black Sea region.

Formulation of the problem. In the current conditions of destabilization of the regional security environment and the general crisis of the post-bipolar system of international relations, Ukraine is at a key stage of its historical development. Ukrainian authorities implement policy of civilizational orientation and seek to restore the violated territorial integrity, to protect national borders from external threats. The situation requires the use of all tools that can help to perform these tasks. The development and deepening of cooperation with the allies representing the Euro-Atlantic system of collective security is becoming extremely important, as this ensures the strengthening of Ukraine's potential both in the general political and practical military spheres.

In such conditions partnership with the Baltic-Black Sea states (which share European values and adequately assess the security situation in the region), formed by the escalation of the Russian threat became of particular relevance. The development of relations with them is a key element in protecting not only Ukraine's sovereignty, but also for the stabilization of the entire eastern flank of Europe. Among them special attention should be given to the Baltic States – Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Despite limited resources at their disposal, their help and readiness to support Ukraine has received proper recognition. It allows us to put forward a hypothesis about the strategic nature of the Ukrainian-Baltic partnership – which in turn makes this vector of foreign policy a priority for Kyiv.

The aim of the study is to assess the depth of Ukraine's partnership with the Baltic States, to determine their compliance with the concept of strategic partnership on the basis of comprehensive description of their formative elements and practical aspects of implementation.

Highlighting of the previously unresolved parts of a common problem. Ukraine's relations with regional partners, including the Baltic States, are properly studied in the scientific literature. However, the issue is often covered only in general terms – instead, the emphasis on the most relevant segment of the partnership (security cooperation) is absent. Also, the assessment of the level of relations is usually generalized and not supported by theoretical approaches to the nature and characteristics of the phenomenon of “strategic partnership”, which is declaratively attributed to the Ukrainian-Baltic relations. Researchers do not pay attention to the national specifics of Ukraine's bilateral relations with Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, which determine the differences in their depth. It is these aspects that are emphasized in this article, which is an attempt to highlight the problem taking into account such elements of the topic being studied.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Scientific publications on the research topic can be divided into two groups. The first includes works that address general theoretical issues – the essence of interstate cooperation and the phenomenon of strategic partnership in international relations. The second

group of works consists of publications that highlight the specifics of Ukraine's relations with the Baltic States. Among the authors who studied the principles, patterns and models of interstate cooperation, we should mention B. Lo, I. Zhovkva, M. Fesenko. Partner relations between Ukraine and Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia are studied in the works of I. Bruĝe, E. Gajauskaitė, S. Murinska, O. Aleksandrova, R. Dodonov, M. Zamikula, N. Krasnozhon.

The Results of the Research. Strategic partnership is the highest form of friendly international relations. It is a special tool of the state's foreign policy, that is used in order to coordinate actions in the international arena with other countries. The use of this tool and the coincidence of strategic national interests of two or more states in several areas lead to a special type of interstate cooperation between them, which can also be characterized by this term¹. In other words, strategic partnership is a type of interstate relations built as a consistent system of interaction between states in the direction of implementing common strategic objectives, interests and goals.

Depending on the strength of the state, the strategic partnership has different grounds and tasks. The implementation of a strategic partnership requires such conditions as:

- the existence of fundamentally important goals, the achievement of which is possible only with serious coordination of efforts by the parties;
- common understanding of the goals and principles of strategic partnership development by the parties;
- the existence of the legal framework of the partnership, which defines the content of cooperation and mechanisms for its implementation;
- the existence of established institutional mechanisms through which the strategic partnership is implemented;
- the superiority of the common goals of the parties over the differences in bilateral relations;
- coincidence of the paradigm of values of the socio-political process of both parties².

At the same time, some factors can hinder a strategic partnership. Among them special attention should be given to differences in approaches to building a political system or negative historical stereotypes, which have influence on the image of the potential partner.

One of the most important aspects of a strategic partnership is its duration, created by the partners' commitment to developing long-term relationships. For its successful implementation, partners should have potential and capacity to influence the development of bilateral relations, based on stability, continuity and mutual benefits. Strategic relations are characterized by reciprocity and resilience – they remain flexible and strong, even despite temporary problems or misunderstandings. Because of this they should be based on tactical opportunism, a broad compatibility of goals and objectives of the involved parties. In such conditions a situation arises when partners are able to identify common interests and put them as a keystone of long-term and real cooperation, which is based on a common vision of the structure of the international system and their role in it³.

A strategic partnership is characterized by flexible voluntary cooperation based on a formal mutual commitment. Therefore, this form of relations has a wide range of implementation and can be defined as a process of formalized, structured and institutionalized international cooperation in order to achieve common strategic goals arising from national interests and the desire to increase national security. This definition of strategic partnership allows to characterize a specific cooperation as strategic by identifying its variables, such as: compliance with national security interests, formulation of common goals, formalization of the process of implementation and institutionalization of relations⁴.

The nature of Ukrainian-Baltic relations corresponds to the model of strategic partnership based on the existence of a common threat. This situation occurs when two or more actors unite against a common enemy, and even after the disappearance or reduction of the threat, the partnership continues to function⁵. In our case

¹ Жовква, І. (2019). Інструмент стратегічного партнерства в зовнішній політиці України. *Зовнішня політика і дипломатія: історичний та сучасний вимір*, 13, 79-80.

² Фесенко, М. (2015). Глобальне стратегічне партнерство провідних акторів: теоретико-методологічний вимір. *Вісник Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка*, 1 (43), 25.

³ Lo, B. (2008). *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics*. Brookings Institution Press, 42.

⁴ Gajauskaitė, I. (2014). Partnerships in Foreign Policy: Comparative Analysis of Polish – Ukrainian and Lithuanian – Ukrainian Strategic Partnerships. *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, 11, 1, 194.

⁵ Фесенко, М. (2015). Глобальне стратегічне партнерство провідних акторів: теоретико-методологічний вимір. *Вісник Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка*, 1 (43), 27-28.

it is based on concerns raised by Russian policy in the Baltic-Black Sea region. The aggressive imperialist rhetoric of the Russian Federation, which is gradually turning into a full-fledged revisionist-revanchist policy, threatens the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbors. It is an objective reality of the regional space, which creates common challenges and requires an appropriate joint response.

From the geopolitical point of view an important element in promoting the Ukrainian-Baltic partnership is the compliance of these processes with the interests of a key actor of the Western world – the United States of America. Taking into account current split in the Euro-Atlantic community, Washington must reconsider its own European policy. The leading countries of Western Europe, guided by their own ambitions, potential and interests, do not agree with American hegemony. On the other hand, states of Central and Eastern Europe – the new members of the EU and NATO – have traditionally taken a pro-American position. A similar policy is pursued by countries aspiring to NATO membership, such as Ukraine, for which American support is becoming an extremely important element in protecting their own security. Joining the American allies into united “security belt” simplifies the response to existing challenges in the region, and at the same time counterbalances Old Europe on the continent. Thus, it directly affects the strengthening of American positions in the European space – and can receive approval from the United States.

The consolidation of Ukrainian-Baltic relations is facilitated by the civilizational orientation of Ukraine and the Baltic States to the European vector of development and values. Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have never questioned the priority of this foreign policy direction. In practical terms, Ukraine has lost many years due to the slowdown in integration processes and the period of uncertainty. However, it has never declaratively rejected the special attitude towards Europe as an example for development. Thus, under any circumstances, Ukraine and the Baltic States are united by an understanding of the place and role of Europe and Western civilization in the modern world – and by their own self-identification within its ranks.

Another factor that strengthens the bilateral and multilateral partnership between Ukraine and the Baltic States is the time-tested friendly position of political elites on the issue of development of interstate relations. An analysis of the approaches of the leading political forces of the Baltic States to the assessment of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict shows that the majority of them take a clear pro-Ukrainian position. Right-wing political parties, such as the Estonian Reform Party and the Conservative People’s Party, the Latvian National Alliance and the Lithuanian Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats, are key allies of Ukraine. At the same time centrist and left-wing political forces, despite some accusations of pro-Russian positions, also duly support Ukraine. The relatively lesser attention to the Russian threat in their rhetoric is primarily due to the focus on the internal problems of states, rather than sympathy for Russia. There are indeed certain pro-Russian parties in the Baltic States – but they have minor opportunities to influence public policy due to the fact that most of the electorate does not accept this position.

Also, attention should be paid to the positive assessment given to interstate cooperation by experts from Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. This demonstrates the high level of partnership among thinkers responsible for the formulation of theoretical approach to the state’s foreign and security policies. For example, the experts of the Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism”, which annually conducts an audit of Ukraine’s international activities, have high opinion on the issue of Ukraine’s relations with the Baltic States. Its overall assessment in the period of 2015-2019 has never dropped below “B-”¹. At the same time, Baltic experts highly appreciate the analytical work of Ukrainian colleagues on topical issues of hybrid threats and regional security – laying the groundwork for professional cooperation of expert circles.

Ukraine’s bilateral relations with Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are based on a strong regulatory framework, which has been in place since the early 1990s. In the field of security, they are based on ministerial-level general agreements and specific documents. In the case of Ukrainian-Lithuanian relations an important role was played by military cooperation in the field of international peacekeeping.

Ukraine’s cooperation with the Baltic States in the security field has several dimensions. The highest of them is the coordination of efforts and protection of interests in the international arena. Today, it is primarily formed by the advocacy of Ukraine’s interests by Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in the framework of multilateral diplomacy in the global arena of international relations. Prospects for its deepening in the political and diplomatic sphere include further lobbying of Ukraine’s foreign policy interests; condemnation of the occupation of Crimea and the aggression of the Russian Federation in Eastern Ukraine; the invariability

¹ *Українська призма: Зовнішня політика 2019. Аналітичне дослідження (2020)*. Київ: ГО «Рада зовнішньої політики «Українська призма», Фонд ім. Ф. Еберта, 234.

of support of the Ukrainian territorial integrity and sovereignty in multilateral platforms (UN, OSCE, Council of Europe); support for the continuation of anti-Russian sanctions; support for the initiatives of the Ukrainian authorities aimed at ensuring the restoration of control over the occupied territories; development of multilateral cooperation with Ukraine at the subregional level.

Cooperation in the context of the implementation of integration policy remains an important element of the Baltic States' relations with Ukraine. Since 2004, they have remained powerful advocates for Ukraine in NATO and the EU, using their status as members of these organizations to support the interests of potential Eastern European candidates for membership. These states are Ukraine's consistent allies who are ready to raise the issue of EU and NATO enlargement to the East even in the face of ambiguous attitudes to this idea of Western European countries, which are concerned about Russia's reaction on it.

The main criterion of a strategic partnership is the mutual interest of partners in cooperation and a large number of areas for its practical implementation. The analysis of Ukrainian-Baltic relations in the defense sphere demonstrates this approach – on the basis of it, several areas in which cooperation has become relevant in recent years are clearly defined.

Efforts to increase the combat capability of national armed forces through training and exchange of experience are becoming a key element of the partnership today. Primarily we are talking about the participation of the Baltic States in providing training for Ukrainian servicemen. For example, Latvia began such activities in 2015, when provided training courses for Ukrainian specialists in neutralizing munitions and learning English¹. Next year the Latvian military had joined the Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine. Since the same time Lithuanian instructors started their work in this structure. Their activities are directed to improve the training of Ukrainian special forces and military police, the formation of a renewed and effective sergeant corps within the Ukrainian Armed Forces. These segments of training activity are indicated as the most effective – both in the Ukrainian official documents² and in the interview of the military attaché of Lithuania in Ukraine A. Norkus³. At the same time, Ukrainians study at Lithuanian institutions of military education, as well as in the Baltic Defense College (Tartu, Estonia).

Politicians and expert community of the Baltic States are interested in studying the Ukrainian experience of countering aggression. The most interesting for them is to study Russian methods of hybrid warfare which were used against Ukraine, and to get acquainted with promising strategies to counter this threat. The study of the Ukrainian experience becomes especially relevant for Latvia. The reason for this is the specifics of Latgale, which is the most vulnerable region in terms of external Russian influence⁴. Lithuania is also actively studying the Ukrainian experience of countering aggression. Special attention is paid to the analysis of the practice of using special forces in conditions of hybrid warfare⁵. In the more practical field, the Baltic States gain access to the combat experience of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, get first-hand information about Russian tactical schemes, strategies and weapons.

Another area of support for Ukraine, in which the Baltic States are involved, is financial assistance. It is directed in the form of equipment for hospitals, basic necessities for the military on the front line, assistance to the families of IDPs from the ATO zone⁶. Treatment of wounded Ukrainian servicemen in the Baltic States also takes place as an important element of support. Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia started similar practices in August-September 2014. To date, several hundred Ukrainians have received medical care in the Baltic States.

As we can see, Ukraine's relations with the Baltic States, which demonstrate the consistent support of our state in the international arena and participate in the implementation of a series of projects aimed at strengthening its defense potential, have a high level. However, in the field of practical interaction, their content is not equivalent.

¹ Bruġe, I. (2016). Latvia's Ukraine Policy: The Ukraine Crisis and Bilateral Relations in 2015. *Latvian Foreign and Security Policy. Yearbook 2016*, 75.

² *White book-2018. The Armed Forces of Ukraine* (2019). Kyiv: Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 132.

³ Сірук, М. (2020). Про особливості литовських інвестицій (інтерв'ю з військовим аташе Литовської Республіки в Україні А. Норкусом). *День*. <<https://m.day.kyiv.ua/uk/article/den-planety/pro-osoblyvist-lytovskyyh-investytsyj>>. (2020, July, 11).

⁴ Murinska, S., Aleksandrova, O., Dodonov, R. (2018). Information Warfare: Future Challenges of Latvia and Ukraine. *Схід*, 5 (157), 69.

⁵ *Lithuanian Defence policy White Paper* (2017). Vilnius: Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, 37.

⁶ Красножон, Н.Г. (2019). Українсько-латвійське співробітництво у військовій сфері у період 1991-2018 рр. *Воєнно-історичний вісник*, 4 (34), 86-89.

The partnership between Ukraine and Lithuania has the highest level. It affects several areas of activity that are critical to ensuring the defense capabilities of our state. In this context, Lithuania occupies a special place in Ukraine's foreign policy – not only among the Baltic States, but also among all Ukrainian partners.

First of all, the Lithuanian authorities are making efforts to improve the logistics of the Ukrainian army. Agreements on military-technical assistance between the states were established in November 2014. The Republic of Lithuania became the first and only European state to supply Ukraine with lethal weapons during the Ukrainian-Russian conflict¹. The donated amounts of assistance cannot be regarded as a large contribution to improving Ukraine's defense capabilities – however, they are of great informational and moral importance. Interestingly, doubts are expressed at the expert level about the exclusively Lithuanian origin of these weapons and military materials. There is a reason to believe that the Republic of Lithuania has acted as a kind of intermediary in the transfer of military aid collected in several Central and Eastern European NATO member states to Ukraine². In this case, the role of Lithuania as a partner is even more important – as it demonstrates clear absence of fear of Russian reaction, which was obviously negative on the issue.

Another important element of Lithuanian-Ukrainian cooperation is the functioning of the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian brigade. This project was agreed in 2008 – but the formation of the unit was significantly delayed. Only in 2014-2015 it received a new push. The process of practical training of the brigade, which consists of three national battalions and a multinational headquarters located in Lublin (Poland), began in autumn 2015. Finally, in December 2016, the brigade reaffirmed its full operational capabilities and readiness to carry out peacekeeping missions. Today it is becoming an important element in achieving mutual compatibility of the Ukrainian and Lithuanian armed forces. It opens up prospects for the development of a functional Baltic-Black Sea “security belt”.

In the case of Estonia, a characteristic feature of the partnership is its sectoral focus and learning of experience. The Republic of Estonia has the latter in several specific areas of security sector development, which are of special interest to Ukraine.

An important role in the implementation of Estonia's defense strategy is given to the system of territorial defense, which is functioning in the form of voluntary paramilitary Estonian Defense League (Kaitseliit). This approach significantly enhances the capacity of the regular armed forces, while avoiding the additional costs of maintaining them. It is especially relevant for Ukraine – given the need to develop new approaches to ensure the state's defense capabilities. An important place in the process is played by the study and borrowing of the Estonian experience. Both NGOs (such as “Ukrainian Legion”) and official structures (Ministry of Defense and the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine) are involved in this.

The Republic of Estonia is also a key player in NATO's cyber defense system. This state is characterized by an extremely high level of digitalization – since the mid-2000s, it has been actively introducing information technology for the functioning of e-government or providing remote voting in elections. It is on Estonian territory that the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence has been established. Given its own achievements in this field, Tallinn pays much attention to the transfer of experience to partners. Among them, an important place is occupied by Ukraine, for which the issues of cyber defense became relevant in the conditions of hybrid aggression of the Russian Federation. The partnership mainly develops in the format of staff training, technical advice and equipment transfer.

Conclusions

Analysis of the basic elements that shape the nature of Ukraine's relations with the Baltic States suggests that they have all the necessary features to correspond the concept of strategic partnership. Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are united by a European civilizational identity, which in turn forms their views on the nature of the international environment. The model of joining forces to counter the common threat – which is now the policy of the Russian Federation in the Baltic-Black Sea region – lays at the center of their relations. The potential of the partnership is formed by the presence of a developed normative framework; practical experience of cooperation; positive assessment of such vector of foreign policy by political elites, society and the expert community; the interest of an external actor – the United States – in the formation of an alliance of pro-American Eastern European states.

In the field of positioning in the international arena, the Ukrainian-Baltic relations have already allowed us to talk about their strategic nature and importance. Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are consistent allies

¹ Lithuania National Report on the Arms Trade – 2016 (2017). *The Global Reported Arms Trade, The UN Register of Conventional Arms*. <<http://www.un-register.org/SmallArms/CountrySummaryId.aspx?CoI=113>>. (2020, July, 10).

² Сунгуровський, М. (2018). Зброя із США. Двері відкриваються. *НВ*. <<https://nv.ua/ukr/opinion/zbroja-z-ssha-dveri-vidkrivajutsja-2445636.html>>. (2020, July, 11).

of Kyiv, defending the territorial integrity and integration prospects of Ukraine. At the same time in the field of practical security and defense cooperation the situation is somewhat different. Despite the existence of several areas of cooperation in which all three Baltic States make a significant contribution to Ukraine's capabilities (training and treatment of servicemen of the Ukrainian army, financial and humanitarian assistance), the level of bilateral relations between Ukraine and Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia differ. In the case of Ukrainian-Lithuanian relations, we can speak of a de facto strategic partnership (illustrated by cooperation in the format of the LITPOLUKRBRIG project, as well as the supply of lethal weapons to Ukraine made by Lithuania). Ukraine's cooperation with Estonia has sectoral features – it concentrates on the areas of borrowing Estonian experience in forming systems of territorial defense and cybersecurity. Ukraine's relations with Latvia has the lowest level among all three Baltic States. However, this does not change the fact that the support of all these states is extremely important for Ukraine in modern conditions. The development of cooperation between them consolidates the efforts to protect the eastern flank of the European space.

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