

# NATO – Ukraine Relations Dynamics



**Dr. Oleksandr  
S. POLTORATSKYY**  
Associate Professor  
Department of Regional  
Systems and European  
Integration  
Diplomatic Academy  
of Ukraine  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
of Ukraine

Since the end of the Cold War the policy of building broad and comprehensive partnerships with many countries became the most successful element of NATO's strategy. In the course of two decades, a global network of partner relations has been created based on common goals, voluntariness, mutual benefit and respect. Various programs, flexible partnership formats along with individual approach tailored to each partner have always served as key elements to successful peace-building and strengthening security and stability in Europe and beyond. In this regard Ukraine so far has never been and hopefully will never be an exception

## The First Stage: From Initial Cooperation to the Distinctive Partnership (1991-2002)

Politically since gaining its independence in the early 1990-s Ukraine has been committed to contributing to international security and to the establishment of regional relations on a new basis. NATO-Ukraine relations were formally launched in 1991, when Ukraine joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (succeeded by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997), immediately upon achieving independence with the break-up of the Soviet Union. Later on, after Ukraine's accession to the Partnership for Peace Framework Document in February 1994 along with the PfP development Ukraine has considered Partnership as a principle mechanism for creating practical security ties between the Alliance and its partners as well as the way towards the improvement of interoperability between Partners and the Alliance.

The level of a distinctive partnership was provided due to the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between NATO and Ukraine signed in Madrid in 1997 which set legal framework for such cooperation. It's important to emphasize the pivotal significance of Ukraine for European security and stability as it was stipulated in the Charter as well as the interdependence between

Статтю присвячено розгляду характеру формування відносин між Україною та Північноатлантичним альянсом крізь призму аналізу особливостей їх основних етапів, починаючи з моменту відновлення Україною незалежності у 1991 році до сьогодення. Особливу увагу приділено динаміці розвитку основних сучасних напрямів поглибленого конструктивного партнерства, а також практичної та взаємовигідної взаємодії між Україною та НАТО.

Ukraine's security and the security of all European States. The Charter established the framework of cooperation through several mechanisms:

- NATO-Ukraine Commission at the ambassadorial level for coordination and further development of a distinctive partnership;
- consultations with NATO committees in the "19+1" format;
- high-level visits and the exchange of expert groups;
- Crisis consultative mechanism in case of a direct threat to Ukraine's territorial integrity, political independence or security.

In December 1997 according to the Decree of the President of Ukraine the Ukrainian Mission to NATO was appointed. In 1998 both parties initiated the establishment of a Joint Working Group on Defence Reform (JWGDR) that remains today an effective form of partnership in defense sphere between our country and the Alliance including the establishment of civilian and democratic control over the military organization of the state and the conduct of the multinational military exercises and peacekeeping operations.

## The Second Stage: Towards Membership (2002-2010)

On 23 May 2002 just before the fifth anniversary of the Charter a serious practical step was made as concerns the implementation of the relevant priorities of NATO-Ukraine relations. The National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine announced of its decision to start elaboration of the strategy aiming at Ukraine's eventual accession to the system of security based on the Atlantic Alliance.

It should be stressed here that this announcement was highly appreciated by NATO top authorities. Steps were also taken to deepen and broaden the NATO-Ukraine relationship with the adoption of the NATO-Ukraine Action Plan in November 2002, which supports Ukraine's reform efforts on the road towards Euro-Atlantic integration, thus defining political, economic, military and other reform areas where Ukraine is committed to make further progress and where NATO will continue to assist.

On 8 July, 2002 the President of Ukraine in accordance with the Article 107



of the Constitution of Ukraine made effective the National Security and Defence Council decision by his Decree "On Ukraine's Strategy towards the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)".

Tactical steps in realization of the aforesaid strategic foreign policy tasks in the Euro-Atlantic direction were defined by NATO-Ukraine Target Plan for 2003 and successive years.

In the wake of the "Orange Revolution", NATO leaders expressed support for the new President's ambitious reform plans for Ukraine and agreed to sharpen and refocus NATO-Ukraine cooperation in line with the new government's priorities. At the NUC meeting of foreign ministers in Vilnius, Lithuania, in April 2005, the Allies and Ukraine launched an Intensified Dialogue on Ukraine's aspirations to NATO membership. They also announced a package of short-term actions designed to enhance NATO-Ukraine cooperation in key reform areas.

At the Bucharest Summit in April 2008, Allied leaders agreed that Ukraine may become a NATO member in future.

In August 2009, a "Declaration to Complement the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between NATO and Ukraine" was signed. It gives the NUC a central role in deepening political dialogue and cooperation, and in underpinning Ukraine's reform efforts pertaining to its membership aspirations.

### **The Third Stage: Back to the Distinctive and Towards the Constructive Partnership (2010-present days)**

After the 2010 presidential elections, Ukraine has radically changed the security element of its foreign policy. The newly elected government made it clear that while Ukraine was not pursuing NATO membership, it wished to maintain the existing level of cooperation with the Alliance and to fulfill existing agreements. Continued political and military dialogue for regional stability, practical support for NATO-led operations and defense reform were identified as the main tasks for NATO-Ukraine cooperation. All in all, active political dialogue between Ukraine and the Alliance is provided both domestically and internationally.

International dimension implies several elements: the 1997 Charter for a Distinctive Partnership, enhanced by the August 2009 Declaration remains the basic foundation underpinning NATO-Ukraine relations. The NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC) plays key role in the bilateral dialogue, directs cooperative activities and provides a forum for consultation between the Allies and Ukraine on security issues of common concern.

Joint working groups have been set up under the auspices of the NUC, to take work forward in specific areas. Of particular importance are the Political and Partnerships Committee in NUC format, which takes the leading role in developing of annual national programmes and preparing high-level meetings of the NUC; and the Joint Wor-

king Group on Defense Reform, which facilitates consultation and practical cooperation in the priority area of defence and security sector reform.

Two NATO offices in Kyiv support cooperation on the ground in key areas. The NATO Information and Documentation Centre, established in 1997, support efforts to inform the public about NATO's activities and the benefits of NATO-Ukraine cooperation. The NATO Liaison Office, established in 1999, facilitates Ukraine's participation in NATO's Partnership for Peace program and supports its reform efforts, by liaising with the Ministry of Defense and other Ukrainian agencies.

Domestic dimension implies the following elements:

1. According to the Law of Ukraine "On the Foundations of Domestic and Foreign Policy" the non-bloc status means "non-participation by Ukraine in military and political alliances, the priority given to participation in developing the European collective security system, the continuation of a constructive partnership with NATO and other military-political blocs on all issues of mutual interest.

Ukraine has always been a special partner for NATO. The Alliance respects the sovereign choice of Ukraine on its non-bloc status and seeks to "continue and develop the partnership with Ukraine [...] within the NATO-Ukraine Commission, based on the NATO decision at the Bucharest summit 2008" (NATO Strategic Concept 2010).

2. Annual National Programme (ANP) The new ANP, established in 2009, has replaced the previous Annual Target Plans, which

implemented the long-term objectives set out in the the 2002 NATO-Ukraine Action Plan. It is composed of five chapters focusing on: political and economic issues; defense and military issues; resources; security issues; and legal issues. The NUC assesses progress under the ANP annually.

The responsibility for implementation falls primarily on Ukraine, which is being urged to take the reform process forward vigorously in order to strengthen democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the market economy.

In 2010 the Commission for Ukraine's partnership with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was established as a high-level national body that would act as a coordination mechanism for cooperation with NATO. This Commission includes National Coordinators for each of the five areas covered in the ANP.

### **The Present Key Lines and Areas of NATO-Ukraine Interaction**

Consultations and cooperation between NATO and Ukraine cover a wide range of areas identified in the 1997 Charter and the 2002 Action Plan. These include peace-support operations, defense and security sector reform, military-to-military cooperation, armaments, civil emergency planning, science and environment, and public information.

#### **Peace-support operations**

Ukraine has a proven track record of actively contributing to Euro-Atlantic security by deploying troops to work together with peacekeepers from NATO and Partner countries. Currently it is the only Partner co-

untry contributing actively to the four main ongoing NATO-led operations and missions.

Ukraine contributed an infantry battalion, a mechanized infantry battalion and a helicopter squadron to the NATO-led peacekeeping force in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Deployments to the NATO-led operation in Kosovo have included a helicopter squadron, infantry companies, headquarters personnel and support staff. Currently, Ukraine contributes 130 personnel to the KFOR mission as part of the joint Polish-Ukrainian battalion, in the Multinational Task Force "East."

The country is further contributing to international stability and the fight against terrorism by providing over-flight clearance for forces deployed in Afghanistan as part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, or as part of the coalition forces under the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom. A transit agreement for the supply of ISAF was signed by Ukraine in April 2009. Ukrainian medical personnel have supported the Lithuanian-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan since 2007, and the Polish PRT since 2010. Currently, Ukraine provides a total of 22 military personnel to ISAF. Recently, Ukraine has also pledged to contribute instructors to the NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan (NTM-A) to facilitate the transition process there.

From March 2005, Ukraine also contributed officers to the NATO Training Mission in Iraq, which terminated in December 2011.

Moreover, Ukraine supports Operation Active En-



deavour, NATO's maritime operation in the Mediterranean aimed at helping deter, disrupt and protect against terrorism. Ukraine has contributed naval assets to the operation six times since 2007, most recently in November 2010.

Ukraine is also the first partner country to contribute to the NATO Response Force (NRF). In 2010, Ukraine contributed a platoon specialized in nuclear, biological and chemical threats to the NRF. In 2011, Ukraine is providing strategic airlift capabilities with their Antonov aircraft.

### **Defense and security sector reform**

Ukraine's cooperation with NATO in the area of defence and security sector reform is crucial to the ongoing transformation of Ukraine's security posture and remains an essential part of its democratic transition.

Ukraine has sought NATO's support in efforts to transform its Cold War legacy of massive conscript forces into smaller, professional and more mobile armed forces, able to meet the country's security needs and to contribute actively to stability and

security in the Euro-Atlantic area and beyond. Another overarching objective of NATO-Ukraine cooperation in this area is to strengthen democratic and civilian control of Ukraine's armed forces and security institutions.

A Joint Working Group on Defense Reform (JWGDR), established in 1998, directs cooperation in the area of defense and security sector reform. (See also related web page on the JWGDR)

Ukraine's drive to reform its defense and security sector also benefits from participation in the Partnership for Peace (PfP). In particular, the PfP Planning and Review Process enables joint goals to be developed for shaping force structures and capabilities to help develop Ukraine's forces to be better able to work with NATO forces.

### **Military-to-military cooperation**

Helping Ukraine implement its defense reform objectives is also a key focus of military-to-military cooperation, complementing the work carried out under the JWGDR with military expertise.

Another important objec-

tive is to develop interoperability through a wide range of PfP activities and military exercises, sometimes hosted by Ukraine, which allow military personnel to train for peace-support operations and gain hands-on experience of working with forces from NATO countries and other partners.

Senior Ukrainian officers also regularly participate in courses at the NATO Defense College in Rome, Italy, and the NATO School at Oberammergau, Germany. Contacts with these establishments have been instrumental in setting up a new multinational faculty at the Ukrainian National Defense University.

The military side has also taken the lead in developing a legal framework to enable NATO and Ukraine to further develop operational cooperation:

- a PfP Status of Forces Agreement facilitates participation in PfP military exercises by exempting participants from passport and visa regulations and immigration inspection on entering or leaving the territory of the country hosting the event (entered into force in May 2000);



- a Host Nation Support agreement addresses issues related to the provision of civil and military assistance to Allied forces located on, or in transit through, Ukrainian territory in peacetime, crisis or war (ratified in March 2004);

- a Strategic Airlift agreement enables Ukraine to make a substantial contribution to NATO's capability to move outsized cargo by leasing Antonov aircraft to Allied armed forces – an arrangement which also brings economic benefits to Ukraine (ratified in October 2006).

### Armaments

Technical cooperation between Ukraine and NATO in the field of armaments focuses on enhancing interoperability between defence systems to facilitate Ukrainian contributions to joint peace support operations.

Cooperation in this area started when Ukraine joined the PfP program and began participating in an increasing number of the armaments groups which meet under the auspices of the Conference of National Armaments Directors (CNAD)

– a NATO senior body which identifies opportunities for cooperation between nations in defense equipment procurement processes, focusing in particular on technical standards.

A Joint Working Group on Armaments, which met for the first time in March 2004, is supporting the further development of cooperation in this area.

### Civil Emergency Planning

NATO and Ukraine have developed practical cooperation on civil emergency planning and disaster-preparedness, since the signing of a memorandum of understanding in 1997.

Ukraine's western regions are prone to heavy flooding and NATO countries and other partners have provided assistance after severe floods in 1995, 1998 and 2001. A key focus of cooperation has therefore been to help Ukraine to prepare better for such emergencies and to manage their consequences more effectively.

PfP exercises also help develop plans and effective disaster-response capabilities to deal with other natural emergencies such as avalan-

ches and earthquakes, or man-made accidents or terrorist attacks involving toxic spills or chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear agents – Ukraine hosted one such exercise in 2005. In 2010, Ukraine also sent a mobile rescue centre to Poland as part of an aid effort following flooding in the country.

### Science and Environment

Ukraine's participation in NATO science programs began in 1991 and intensified following an exchange of letters on cooperation in the area of science and the environment in 1999. Over the years, Ukraine has been second only to Russia in terms of NATO grants for scientific collaboration.

In addition to applying science to defense against terrorism and new threats, Ukraine's priority areas for cooperation include information technologies, cell biology and biotechnology, new materials, the rational use of natural resources and cooperation focused on defence-related environmental problems.

NATO has also sponsored several projects to provide basic infrastructure for com-

puter networking among Ukrainian research communities and to facilitate their access to the internet. Although the focus of past collaboration has been in the area of physical sciences, project proposals are now also being considered which deal with security issues from a social science perspective. For example, a new Trust Fund is being considered that will help remove and decontaminate military sites with stored radioactive waste.

A Joint Working Group on Scientific and Environmental Cooperation is supporting the further development of cooperation in this area.

### Public Information

It is important for the Ukrainian administration to inform the Ukrainian people about NATO-Ukraine relations and the benefits of cooperation in terms of Ukraine's own reform programme. Many people in Ukraine still lack information regarding the role, activities and goals of the Alliance, and outdated Cold War stereotypes remain strong in the minds of some.

The Allies have offered to cooperate with the Ukrainian authorities in raising awareness about what NATO is today, and in better explaining the NATO-Ukraine relationship.

The NATO Information and Documentation Centre, based in Kyiv, is NATO's principal public information facility, offering seminars and talks, as well as coordinating visits by NATO officials to Ukraine and representatives of Ukrainian civil society to NATO Headquarters in order to better illustrate the mechanisms behind the partnership.

