



## **Role of the Carpathian Euroregion in Strengthening Security and Stability in Central Eastern Europe (The ethnic minority issue)**

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Author in this article paid attention to influence of internal and external factors to integration of Ukraine in European structures. Individual attention in this manner is paid to the importance of Carpathian euro region as an actor of international relations. Author highlights the tendencies of relations between ethnics and draws attention to latent risks of national conflicts in this borderline region.

Ukraine. Carpathian Euroregion. Central Eastern Europe .

### Introduction

The last decade of the 20th century have become the transition period to the new European order. Accession of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to NATO in March 1999 became the first practical step, which coincided with the 50th Anniversary of the Alliance. It is sure that Romania, Slovenia and the other nine European countries will follow them. At the same time EU enlargement is taking place and there have been the negotiations commenced about Poland's, Hungary's, Czech Republic's, Cyprus's, Slovenia's and Estonia's joining EU. The second wave of EU enlargement is being under consideration now: Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Malta and even Turkey. Thirteen European countries in general. As a result, at the beginning of the century we might face the consolidated Europe in which a would be united three groups of states:

- 19 NATO and EU members (in enlarged version);
- states which are not NATO and EU members but which are gravitating towards them;
- Russia in the union with Belarus and may be with some other states of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States).

In this case a common Europe will have a strong core connected closely with the USA and outlying area which is gravitating towards this core. One should notice that only Ukraine and Moldova fall out from this conglomerate of European countries. Valuating the prospects of the political situation development in Europe, one should take into account that both NATO and Russia, from the point of view of their nature and interests, remain as yet the structures, which have a different military and political direction. The latter has been clearly justified by their open opposition regarding NATO military action in Yugoslavia in 1999 and war in Chechnya. There is no doubt about the fact, that under such complicated and contradictory circumstances, which developed in the Euro-Atlantic region at the beginning of the 21st century, Ukraine with its 50-million population at last should clearly define the choice of its future policy as a subject of international politics. Ukraine must do it on the tenth year of its declared independence.

What is the background of this process?

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I think that three important factors have an impact on the policy of Ukraine and its place in the world. The first factor: Ukrainian government institutions are yet comparatively weak, especially in regard to the adoption of the main legislative acts, choice of policy and governmental consensus, which are necessary for determining and gaining the long-term economic, political and social well-being. Politically, Ukraine is virtually a highly competitive oligarchy, where the factions are interested first of all in the distribution of wealth resources and power. Such policy is rather personified and corrupted. Ukrainian civil society is weak and allows the state to function without reliable control.

The second factor: Ukrainian society is divided, but this has not been caused by the ethnic division into Russians and Ukrainians. Political, economic and regional division are far more important. The main issue solved in Ukraine was independence. For Western and Carpathian region of Ukraine the independence has become the realization of their long-cherished dream. For others - that is for the majority of population of the eastern and southern regions - it has become the fact they should take into account at least. The majority of other issues concerning the state and society remain unsolved, beginning with private property and ending with culture, language and geopolitical orientation. Fortunately this division does not reflect the ethnic factor and is mostly determined by the high level of the uncertainty of the population and incomprehension of the processes, than by the profundity. Such differences justify that dissensions among the different factions, which determine Ukrainian international politics, concerning the integration with NATO, EU or CIS, are taking place under circumstances of not formed national, political and geopolitical identity of the country on the whole.

The third factor: geopolitically Ukraine remains between two fires. Numerous geopolitical changes, which gave Ukraine the possibility to become the independent state, did not solve the key question. The country is up to now at the cross-roads between Russia and NATO or EU. These geopolitical aspects are very meaningful. For example Poland is in a different situation though has a neighbour - Belarus. Ukraine has a neighbour - Russia - with its own characteristic view of Ukraine. Therefore the western policy of Ukraine should take into consideration the geopolitical factor. But this factor should not influence the opinion of the West concerning the western development vector of Ukraine.

A specific problem of Ukraine is that, given European standards, it does not have full-fledged non-governmental representation on the international arena: its civic institutions are weak and cannot claim full-scale recognition. A fraction of west-oriented foreign policy elite can not "draw" Ukraine into new Europe.

#### The Carpathian Euroregion as an actor of international relations

In this context elite and the public of the Carpathian Euroregion as an actor of international relations in general may play its role of trans-border co-operation. Relations with Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania should ensure security and stability on the common borders. Unfortunately it will take place under visa regime conditions already in the nearest future. The borders of five postcommunist countries meet on the territory of the Carpathian Euroregion. They all stand a good chance to show their preparedness for national integration with EU and to strengthen stability and security in the region. Evolution of the events in the countries of the CE is an example of the dialectics of balance of the regional and global levels of the international relations. Globalization of the modern system of international relations has an impact on the concrete plans and activities of the CE. Thus, accession of three neighbouring countries (Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic) to NATO, and especially the close perspective of their joining EU, have already led to some visa problems. Just in the framework of the CE, the negative impact of visa regime implementation has to be lessened, using the cross-border contacts. The experience of trans-border co-operation of Ukraine shows that regional co-operation may become the important factor in solving the existing economic and social problems of the transition countries.

#### The ethnic minority issue

The ethnic minority issue is a decisive problem in the interethnic relations of the CE countries, especially nowadays when almost each country has a strong legitimate interest regarding its ethnos being a minority in the neighbouring countries. It is quite evident that the actuality of ethnic minority issue in the CE is defined by at least three important factors:

- radical political and democratic changes in the CEE region by the break of XX-XXI centuries under the conditions of changes of international relations in the region;
- growth of ethnic self-consciousness and identity preservation by the ethnic minorities of the region;
- strong legitimate interest from the CEE countries regarding the representatives of their ethnos which are the minorities on the territories of the Euroregion neighbouring countries.

The issue of the ethnic minority institutionalization in the Transcarpathia as well as in the Carpathian Euroregion on the whole is not a problem, since the substantial legislative basis in each CE country (including Ukraine) creates the favourable and democratic conditions regarding the formation of the public associations and national cultural societies of the CE ethnic minorities.

### The Rusyn issue

So-called "Rusyn issue" should be considered in the terms of the international legal dimension. The Framework Convention (point 1, article 3) clearly determines that any individual's feeling of his difference from the majority of the country population due to the presence of certain ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious characteristics is the main factor of belonging to the national minority. The conclusion of the Ukraine's State Committee on the issues of nationalities and migration officially defines the "Carpathian Rusyns" in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine as a subethnic group of the Ukrainian ethnos, and their language as a local dialect of Ukrainian. Thus, this is the state official version, however the Framework Convention confirms the right of the free choice of the belonging to a minority. We might single out two directions of the Rusyn issue:

ethnocultural dimension: development by the Rusyns of their identity;

ethnopolitical dimension: so-called "political Rusynism" which tackles the "Rusyn issue" by granting Transcarpathia the autonomy being the part of Ukraine. But under the certain conditions these factors may coincide and create latent conflict situations in the dimension of "centre-region" as well as on the international level.

### General characteristics of the multicultural situation in the Carpathian Euroregion

One should notice the traditionally high level of tolerance of interethnic relations in Transcarpathia that might serve as a model of interethnic tolerance for other regions of the European continent. The general trend shows the stabilization and even the reduction of the interethnic distances, and therefore the strengthening of ethnic tolerance, first of all in the so-called "Western block":

- of all ethnic minorities regarding majority - the Ukrainians;
- of the Germans regarding other ethnic communities; though the "self-isolation" of the Germans was found out because of the high level of emigration, in comparison with 1995, when the Germans had been playing the leading role among the ethnic minorities of the region;
- growth of prestige of the Hungarians among the Russians, the Germans, the Jews and the Romas;
- the weakening of ethnic prestige of the Rusyns among the Germans and the Romas because of internal split and regarding the majority.

Under conditions of the "self-isolation" of the Germans, the trend of formation of the parity relations between the Slovaks and the Hungarians has taken shape. The completion of this process is being complicated by the unbalanced relations between the Romanians and the Slovaks. What concerns the so-called "Eastern Slavic block", it is characteristic of weakening the Russian predominance as well as lowering the social status of the Ukrainians that causes the growth of activation of the ethnic Rusyns. But activation of the Rusyns does not threaten security in the existing situation. The genuine danger is in the ruining of the customary system of the restraining interethnic parities and the so-called "Transcarpathian buffer" structure. As a matter of fact, the lack of parity between the Hungarians and the Rusyns, as well as the Rusyns and the Slovaks, and a split of buffer between two ethnic blocks means the growth of interethnic conflictability risk so far on the latent level. However both the stability in the region and the possibility of the more global transformations depend on the position of the ethnic Rusyns. For example, provided ruining the ethnic buffer in Transcarpathia, it could be displaced either in Slovakia or farther in Ukraine that in any case would be undesirable for Ukraine. In the first case Ukraine would be distanced from Europe, in the latter - the Western part of the Ukrainian ethnos would be threatened by the genuine statics.

### The Roma issue

Finally, there is another issue, which belongs to both EU and member states policy priorities. This is the question of the Roma minority, which is a scattered minority living in all participating countries. The Romas settled the area around the Carpathian Mountains in the past and their concentration is quite significant in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine, northern western Romania and eastern Slovakia. The EU has recognized the fact that the Roma issue extends beyond borders of accession states and this is why it should be tackled in a broader European context. There is a need to develop a special program in co-operation with member states and the EU aimed at solving social and cultural problems of the Romas within the area of the Carpathian Euroregion. This is also especially important when we consider

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the fact that the territory of the Carpathian Euroregion is one of the oldest areas of the original settlements of the Romas in Europe.

#### Risk factors of the national conflicts

Analysis of the national conflict risk enables to pick out the next factors that have an impact on the ethnopolitical situation in the region:

- geopolitical position of the ethnic area;
- economic basis of the ethnopolitical situation;
- cultural and historical identity of the national group;
- religious factor;
- the level of the political activity of the ethnic minority in the region.

The interethnic conflict management provides for:

- analysis of the ethnic, economic, social, political, geopolitical and religious situation in the region;
- forecast of the ethnic conflict possibility;
- conflict prevention (taking the preventive measures);
- weakening the risk factors of the ethnic conflict;
- regulation of a conflict.

Ethnic conflict management is more effective having been realized at the early stage. The earlier a conflict situation is revealed, the lesser efforts would be made for its constructive solving.

We consider the next preventive measures to be the most important:

- working out the state program regarding ethnic relations;
- working out the early prevention measures regarding ethnic conflicts on the level of the state authority organs;
- levelling the social and economic development of the regions;
- implementation of the special employment programs in the depressive regions;
- the purposeful propaganda of interethnic tolerance in mass-media;
- the creation of the public organizations aiming at the consolidation of the efforts of the different ethnoses in solving social problems;
- supporting the development of the regional economic interaction as a factor of interethnic interest harmonization;
- widening the powers of the local self-government organs.

In this context the program-purposeful approach should become the main tool of realizing the state national policy aiming at improving the well-being of all people of Ukraine.

#### Conclusions

Peculiarity of the geographic position of the CEE (and CE in particular) region and its marginality have caused the strong interaction and mutual influence between cultures of these nations, when their own cultural values and mentality were being normed in the interaction of the different cultural traditions of the ethnoses which were on the different levels of the cultural and socio-economic development. In this context one should notice both positive and negative consequences of this contradictory process of interaction, namely direct or indirect devaluation of socio-cultures of nations-ethnoses or creation of the extremely radical subcultures provided certain socio-historic conditions. Integration is the actual dimension for the European countries today. Integration of the CEE countries (and the CE countries in particular) with the EU is quite possible in the near future already on the way of the gradual formation of the civil society. Thus the formation of the civil society is the issue of great importance in each CE country. Implementation of the main principles of the European regional policy in Ukraine's political and legislative sphere as well as pointing out the importance of the transfrontier co-operation (CE being an institutional form of the transfrontier co-operation in this particular case) is very actual in terms of Ukraine's real progress in the direction of the European integration. Taking into consideration the necessity of activation of the CE activities, it should be useful to create the constant active expert commissions of the CE representatives which would serve the formation of the constructive dialogue of the scholars and the representatives of the CE local self-government bodies at the expert level. It would serve both finding out the latent conflicts and working out the recommendations regarding their prevention. It would be important from the point of view of forming security in the Carpathian Euroregion too.

What concerns the general characteristics of the interethnic relations in the CE, one should notice the fact of the traditionally high level of the interethnic tolerance that determines interethnic relation stability in the Transcarpathia. It might serve as a model for other regions of the European continent. Active role of Ukraine in developing CE activities will strengthen its international position in the CEE subregion and raise its reputation as the serious and constructive European actor. In development scenarios for Ukraine for 2001 and further and in its geopolitical priorities as the main task has been defined transformation of Ukraine from object of the geopolitical games of the Great Powers into subject of geopolitics. Together with the regeneration processes of European identity this corresponds to Ukraine's potential and resources as of sovereign European country. By all means, inclusion of Ukraine into the process of building new European security structures (including regional) should be realized first of all with taking into consideration Central Eastern European factor.