

Ukraine's Integration Into Europe: Strategic and Tactical Directions

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Ukraine's path to Trans-Atlantic and European integration has not been as rapid as envisaged following the Orange Revolution. Following the September 2007 parliamentary elections an orange coalition was established with a government headed by Yulia Tymoshenko. If an orange coalition and orange president can maintain political unity for the short term (until the 2009 presidential elections) and medium term (until the next parliamentary elections in 2012) the next five years could constitute an important breakthrough in Ukraine's domestic and foreign policy, including the integration of Ukraine into the full range of Trans-Atlantic and European structures.

Ukraine's Relations with NATO

In April 2008 at NATO's Bucharest summit, three Western Balkan states – Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia – will be invited to join NATO. All three have had MAP's since 1999-2002. The only remaining former Yugoslav states still seeking NATO membership is possibly Montenegro which may receive an invitation to join a MAP at the 2008 NATO summit. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia are disinterested in NATO membership.

In NATO's decade-long enlargement process its major test will be to enlarge the organization into the CIS. Although four countries belong to the pro-NATO GUAM regional organization, only two of them – Georgia and Ukraine – seek to join NATO (Moldova and Azerbaijan do not seek membership). Until the autumn 2007 political

crisis in Georgia it was assumed that the country was on target to receive a MAP at the 2008 NATO summit.

Georgia and Ukraine had always been treated as one group by the US and NATO for NATO membership prospects. But, three factors have worked towards the group dividing with Georgia had moved ahead of Ukraine. Firstly, support for NATO membership in Georgia is 70 percent and has broad political support within the ruling authorities and the opposition. In Ukraine's parliament only the two orange forces support NATO membership (although the Yulia Tymoshenko government may not support a presidential request to seek a MAP in Bucharest). Another three political forces are either against (Communists) or ambivalent (Lytvyn bloc and the Party of Regions) towards NATO membership. Secondly, Ukraine has devoted the majority of its energy since the Orange Revolution to defusing domestic crises, implementing constitutional reforms and holding two elections, leading to the failure to grasp an opportunity to enter MAP at the November 2006 Riga summit. Thirdly, Georgia's security situation vis-à-vis Russia is more precarious than that in Ukraine.

Georgia's autumn 2006 crisis may be bad for Georgia, as it may postpone its entrance into a MAP, but this could prove to be fortuitous for Ukraine. Georgia's failure to enter a MAP in 2008 will give Ukraine a second chance to re-join the NATO membership queue together with Georgia (rather than alone). Both countries could strive for a MAP in 2009-2010, after the Ukrainian presidential elections (assuming an orange candidate won), followed by NATO membership in 2010-2012 before, or after, the next parliamentary elections.

Ukraine's advantage over Georgia is that it has fulfilled yearly Action Plans with NATO since 2003. Introduced at the 2002 Prague NATO summit these Action Plans are unique to Ukraine. As the Action Plans cover military, security and political-economic issues a Ukraine-NATO Action Plan could, without too much effort, be converted into a Ukraine-NATO Membership Action Plan. The addition of one word ("Membership") to "Action Plan" would be significant in showing that Ukraine was moving towards NATO membership.

The length of time that countries experience in MAPs is different for each state and dependent on the range of reforms that need to be undertaken. If Ukraine were to join a MAP in 2010 (together with Georgia) this would mean that it had already fulfilled seven yearly Action Plans prior to this. Ukraine's length of time spent in a MAP could be therefore short as the majority of the required reforms would have already been undertaken in Action Plans since 2003.

A referendum on NATO membership is only undertaken on one occasion and usually on the eve of achieving membership. Only 51 percent is required to endorse the referendum. Until the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and anti-American campaigns launched by the authorities in the 2002 and 2004 elections, support for NATO membership was backed by one third of Ukrainians, with one third against and another third undecided. If this balance of public opinion was to be again reached (for example, following the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq under a new US President in 2009) then a 50 percent plus majority could be obtained. A vigorous information campaign would need to be undertaken from now and throughout the MAP.

Ukraine's Relations with the EU

Ukraine's relations with the EU are very different to those of NATO. Whereas NATO has always held an open door to Ukraine's potential membership the EU has undertaken double standards and lack of strategic vision. Nevertheless, NATO membership has traditionally been a stepping stone to EU membership for all post-communist states. Ukraine cannot follow the path of EU neutral members Ireland, Austria, Sweden and Finland who do not desire NATO membership.

The countries of the CIS were never slated for EU membership after the collapse of communism and membership was only offered to central-eastern European countries and the Baltic states. Within this group of countries, the slower reformers did not perform much better than Ukraine. Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria had similar difficulties in their post-communist transitions of slow reform, entrenched post-communist elites, corruption and weak democratic reformers. The advantage these three countries had was that the EU offered them membership which encouraged reform.

All central-eastern European countries and the Baltic states had to prove their commitment to fulfilling the 1993 Copenhagen Criteria adopted by the EU. By 1999-2000, when the EU began membership talks, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria had not made sufficient progress in reform to warrant such a step. Nevertheless, the EU went ahead and gave membership to Slovakia in 2004 and Romania and Bulgaria in 2007.

A second case of double standards was the offer made in 1999-2000 to the Western Balkan states of Stabilisation and Accession Agreements (SAA) that held out the prospect of future membership. None of these countries had proven their commitment to reform in the 1990s and the SAA's were a purely political and geopolitical strategy by

the EU to prevent a return to ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Macedonia was offered candidate status by the EU in 2001 as an inducement to end its civil war.

Today, Ukraine is as advanced in its reforms as these slow reformers in central-eastern Europe and the western Balkans but it continues to be denied membership prospects by the EU. Ukraine has either been denied membership by the EU because it was seen as outside “Europe” (by being in the Eurasian CIS and closely linked to Russia), a view commonly held in the 1990s, or because it had peacefully resolved its ethnic problems and did not experience a civil war (unlike the former Yugoslavia).

Ukraine was therefore offered in February 2005 the rather demeaning membership of the European Neighbourhood Plan (ENP) with a three year Action Plan. Ukraine would have received the ENP Action Plan regardless of whether Viktor Yanukovych or Yushchenko had won the 2004 elections. The ENP ignored the Orange Revolution.

The geographic distribution of ENP members reflects how ill thought out is the EU’s policy towards Ukraine. ENP members include non-European states in Northern Africa and the Middle East as well as three European countries - Ukraine, Moldova and since 2007 Belarus. The ENP does not include the Western Balkans (with Stabilisation and Accession Agreements) or Turkey (a candidate member since 2005) while Russia has excluded itself preferring to conduct a bilateral relationship with the EU. Turkey began membership negotiations in 2005 despite strong opposition to its membership in Western Europe; France and Austria will hold referendums on future EU members. In France support for Ukraine’s membership of the EU is far higher than for Turkey.

In 2008 Ukraine will enter the WTO and the ten year Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) will have reached their finale. What should Ukraine seek to replace the PCA?

The EU has offered to negotiate a Free Trade Area with Ukraine following its entrance into the WTO. Beyond this, Ukraine should follow Russia's suit and no longer participate in the ENP, an organization where the bulk of its members are not within geographic Europe. Ukraine's continued membership in the ENP should be premised on a status different to ENP members who are not in Europe and therefore have no legal right under the 1957 Rome Treaty to join the EU.

Such an ENP status, which has been termed "privileged partnership", should offer Ukraine the prospect of membership. The European Parliament has issued 4 resolutions in support of Ukrainian membership since the Orange Revolution. It is time for the EU to stop adopting double standards to Ukraine and give it the same prospects for membership offered to slow reformers in central-eastern Europe, such as Romania, the Western Balkans and Turkey.

Towards a European Strategy

Ukraine has a strong possibility of completing its integration into Trans-Atlantic and European structures within the next decade. In the short term the following steps need to be taken:

1. Coordinate a MAP and NATO membership with Georgia bilaterally and through GUAM. The tenth anniversary of GUAM was celebrated in

December 2007 at a New York University conference organized by the Center for US-Ukrainian Relations.

2. Ukraine should have a large delegation of policy advisers, government and presidential officials, parliamentary deputies, journalists and NGO leaders at the April 2008 NATO Bucharest summit. There should not be a repeat of the November 2006 Riga NATO summit attended by only a small group of Ukrainians (including only one official).
3. The Ukraine-NATO Committee NGO, to be officially launched in January 2008 with members drawn from Ukraine, Europe and North America, is open to membership by all NGO's and individuals who support Ukraine's Trans-Atlantic aspirations. The Ukraine-NATO Committee will lobby for Ukraine's NATO membership and coordinate the work of a disparate group of NGO's, practioners and journalists who support its aims and objectives.
4. Ukraine's presidential, government and parliamentary elites have the opportunity to establish a cross-party and cross-regional consensus in support of a Ukrainian position towards the EU. Both the orange coalition and parliamentary opposition would be able to agree on a common negotiating position towards the EU that is commiserate with Ukraine's strategic importance and its progress in democratic and economic reforms. Since 2005, Ukraine is the only CIS country defined as 'Free' by the New York-based think tank Freedom House. Ukraine has every right to be treated in the same manner as Romania, Bulgaria, the Western Balkans

and Turkey and Ukraine should not join any ENP or Privileged Partnership if there is no prospect of future membership of the EU. Ukraine has every right to demand to be treated in the same manner as the Western Balkan states whose Stabilisation and Accession Agreements hold out future membership prospects. Failure to do so would constitute punishment for Ukraine having resolved its regional and ethnic conflicts in a peaceful manner.

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