

UKRAINE'S QUEST FOR MATURE NATION STATEHOOD: A ROUNDTABLE

Zbigniew Brzezinski's keynote address: "Ukraine is not Russia"

Following is a transcript of the keynote address by former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski at the "Ukraine's Quest for Mature Nation Statehood: A Roundtable" conference in Washington on September 20.

I've been asked to speak before your conference, and I asked myself, "What is it that I should say?" I've spoken many times about Ukraine and about its place in the world, and about American policy towards Ukraine. And every time I have spoken, I have tried to convey some central theme that struck me as important, and as leading to conclusions and consequences that are of significance.

Some of you may recall that the moment Ukraine became independent, I emphasized repeatedly and publicly that Ukraine's independence transforms the geopolitical map of Europe in a most significant way. That was a theme that I felt was important for Americans to understand. On other occasions, I have stressed that Ukraine's independence signifies the end of the imperial era in Russian history, and this, too, is consequential not only for Russia's neighbors but for Russia itself.

On still other occasions I tried to stress that Ukraine's continued independence and security is as important to Europe's stability and to Central Europe's security as the expansion of NATO – a point of view which in some countries, particularly those which were then seeking entry into NATO, was somewhat controversial because it seemed to downgrade the importance of NATO expansion. But that was not the point. The point was that Ukraine's independence itself maximizes security.

On still other occasions, I have tried to argue that Ukraine's independence is important to Russia's internal evolution, for the fact that Ukraine is independent tends to fortify, in my view, those changes in the Russian political mindset that are conducive to the consolidation and the expansion of democracy. On still other occasions, my central theme has been that Ukraine's future lies within a larger Europe and a larger trans-Atlantic community, and that it is to them that Ukraine should deliberately gravitate.

There have been occasions, especially in the course of my visits to Ukraine, where I have stressed that Ukraine has been remarkably successful in gaining international recognition for its independence, but has not matched that with sufficiently sustained, serious, credible efforts to reform itself.

And last but not least, I have argued on many occasions that, in terms of ultimate self-definition, the Ukrainians should be very deliberate in defining themselves as Central Europeans, for that is essential to the consolidation of a truly outstanding national self-consciousness.

So what can I stress today, particularly to this gathering? What other theme can I advance that might in some respect be useful in thinking about Ukraine? And in reflecting on that dilemma, and not wanting to repeat everything I have said before, I have concluded to stress a theme which to some of you may appear self-evident, but which I fear is not self-evident to most Americans, and which I suspect may not be entirely, at least subconsciously, self-evident to all Ukrainians. And it's a very simple theme, a very simple theme, indeed. And it is that Ukraine is not Russia.

And that's a very important theme because there is a tendency – particularly among Americans, but not just Americans – to have a rather blurred view of Ukraine, and in thinking about Ukraine's future, in thinking about

Ukraine's current reality, to somehow or other merge it with one's perception or thinking of Russia: to think of it, to some extent, as a seamless continuity, even if it is a separate identity. There is a tendency to associate the two in public perception.

And I think, in this context, it is important to emphasize that, first of all, Ukraine's record on human rights is better than Russia's. It's a very obvious proposition to those who follow Ukrainian internal affairs, but I'm not sure it's a proposition that most Americans are conscious of. Yet the fact is that there is no equivalent in the course of the last decade, insofar as Ukraine is concerned, to anything even remotely approximating Chechnya. Even the very difficult, potentially antagonistic possibility of secessionism in Crimea was peacefully, positively handled, and handled in a way that has contributed to the pacification of the problem.

There could have been serious debates and intense social conflicts over language, one of the basic aspects of one's own individual identity. And yet it has been handled with skill and self-restraint.

Political killings in Ukraine have occurred, but much fewer in number and much less frequently than in Russia.

By and large I think it is fair to say that Ukraine's record on human rights has been better than Russia's; it is, in fact, different than Russia's.

Secondly, and that is closely associated with the foregoing, Ukraine's record as a functioning democracy is better than Russia's. Much has been said, particularly in the course of this year, about the so-called "first, democratic and peaceful transfer of power in Russia's 1,000-year history." What has been not said in that context was that the election's timing was manipulated, that the electoral process was much controlled, that conditions were created whereby viable alternative candidacies did not surface, that a clique, in effect, staged a political coup, which was then ratified through a plebiscite.

Ukraine has had a genuinely peaceful, democratic transfer of power from one candidate to another, indeed, from a candidate who was a president in office, who campaigned against another candidate and lost. And that in itself is a very major statement.

And closely connected with that is the relatively better record, in terms of mass media freedom, in Ukraine than in Russia. There has been some manipulation of the mass media in Ukraine as well, particularly in recent times in connection with the referenda that are being discussed, but by and large, in the area of mass media there has not been an overt systematic effort to subordinate independent voices and to impose some concept of state security on the operations of the mass media as, regrettably, is currently taking place in Russia.

Thirdly, Ukraine has a better record in handling foreign aid. That may be controversial, and certainly there have been allegations of mishandling, including even official manipulation of IMF [International Monetary Fund] funds and their accounting, but by and large, these activities, or departures from expected standards, have been less frequent and much smaller in scale than in Russia. Just in the last two days a very senior official in the Russian government has publicly stated that the Russian relationship with the IMF has involved deliberate mishandling, deliberate miscounting, deliberate manipulation of IMF funds – and I'm not even speaking of the kleptocratic practice of direct thievery, in which a variety of senior Russian officials have



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engaged while remaining officials. And that's an important difference. After all, a former prime minister of Russia, who was co-chairman of an important commission with the United States, transformed himself from a relatively modest bureaucrat into a multi-billionaire in the course of several years.

Now, to be sure, we have as a long-standing guest in one of our American jails, a former Ukrainian prime minister, but this is a case of a former official who is no longer playing a constructive and highly visible role in the Ukrainian government. In fact, the scale of corruption, official or private, while disquieting is nowhere near the proportions it has reached in Russia and in our own dealings with Russia.

Significant, too, is the better attitude of Ukraine towards

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the whole concept of the future of Europe and its relationship with the United States. Ukraine accepts the notion that Europe should enlarge; it accepts the notion that the trans-Atlantic alliance should enlarge; and that this is a major factor of global stability. Ukraine has not been engaged in providing active assistance to countries whose policies are visibly directed against the United States, be they Iraq, or Serbia, or, at least on the level of joint declarations, the People's Republic of China. Ukraine has welcomed the enlargement both of the European Community and of NATO as elements of a stable international order which consolidates stability and security on the Eurasian mainland, which creates binding and lasting bonds between the United States and Europe. That is important to the future; it is vital to the United States. It is in this context also that Ukrainian forces have engaged in joint maneuvers with NATO, some of which have been held on Ukrainian soil.

Last but not least, in terms of the general thrust of proclaimed, officially sponsored economic reforms, Ukraine has been prepared to tackle some fundamental problems that still await a resolution in the Russian context. And I have in mind particularly the question of land ownership, which is quite fundamental, not only economically, but to the country's cultural mindset. Confronting that dimension is a very important aspect of creating a pluralistic society, and Ukraine is beginning to tackle that problem.

To be sure, Ukraine has a long way to go, and this group is better informed than most on the shortcomings of Ukraine's domestic policy. But I think in the larger perspective we're still dealing with a country which in some respects has already made a choice – not as clear on some issues as one would wish, but at least a country which is not being misguided by a historical nostalgia for a past that cannot be entirely recreated, as, unfortunately, is the case near

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U.S.-Ukraine strategic partnership panel (from left) are: Ted Kontek, State Department Ukraine Desk; John Lenczowski, Institute for World Politics; Olexander Poteikhin, Embassy of Ukraine; William Miller, former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine; Paula Dobriansky, vice-president, Council on Foreign Relations.

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by. Ukraine does not have this historically rupturing identity crisis that is still besetting the Russian elite, which is quite uncertain on how to answer two basic questions: "What is Russia?" and "Where is Russia?" The Russian elite is still torn, and some answers to "What is Russia?" and "Where is Russia?" originate clearly in historical nostalgia. In that respect Ukraine has already made a major, major transformation.

But if one stresses that Ukraine is not Russia, one presumably has in mind also some implications from that. And I would like to end by just noting a few, very briefly, for the United States and, secondly, for Ukraine.

For the United States the implication is quite simple. If Ukraine is not Russia, then we shouldn't treat it like Russia. It's as simple as that. We should have a relationship with Ukraine that stands on its own feet, including on the symbolic level. I do not think it is a good practice for the U.S. president, when he visits Moscow, or for the U.S. secretary of state, when the secretary of state visits Moscow, to tack on to the visit a few hours of a hasty visit to Ukraine, punctuated by loud slogans pronounced in Ukrainian regarding America's affection for Ukrainian independence. Such symbolism, in my view, sends the wrong message. Ukraine should be treated as a significant, regional, European state, with which it is in the American interest to have a good and solid relationship.

That, in turn, leads to another conclusion, which has already been mentioned, namely, that normal trade relations with Ukraine should not be a hostage to normal trade relations with Russia. There are good reasons for arguing that there should be a normal trade relationship between the United States and Russia, but there are even better reasons for arguing that normal trade relations between the United States and Ukraine should not be conditioned on a normal trade relationship between the United States and Russia. The relationship should stand on its own feet.

And, third, again merely by way of example, if Ukraine is not Russia and if Ukraine's future, in our view, should be in Europe, then we ought to treat Ukraine, bureaucratically, in the same fashion. In other words, handling Ukraine in the State Department should not be part of some office which has a strangely ambiguous name "Newly Independent States," but should be handled by what is commonly referred to in the departmental language as "EUR," or the Division for Europe of the State Department, for that is where Ukraine is, and it's in that context that American policy towards Ukraine ought to be shaped.

It also, I think, follows that we should be clearer about our long-range willingness to see Ukraine join, whenever it is ready and qualified to join, both NATO and the European Community. I thought President Clinton did historically the correct thing when he, in his Charlemagne speech in Aachen, in effect, invited Russia eventually to join the European Union and NATO, although this initiative was more personal than collective, for, to my knowledge, neither the European Union nor NATO authorized him to issue these invitations.

But it seems to me that if Russia going to be eventually a member of the European Union and/or of NATO, there's a minor geographical problem on the way – there's something in-between. And what about that which is in between, and particularly, Ukraine? I think we ought to be very clear that in our view of the Europe that's more secure, and whole, and free, and of the European-American alliance that embraces a Europe that is whole and free, that in our vision of the future, Ukraine is part of it. I think that is essential. And I think, frankly,

that is more likely than to produce objective conditions that encourage the Russians to seek a similar relationship. Whereas ambiguity on that score has rather negative effects on the nostalgia that still preys on the imaginations of many members of the current Kremlin elite.

Insofar as Ukraine is concerned, in my view, if Ukraine is not Russia, and if Ukrainians share that view that Ukraine is not Russia it behooves them not to waffle about the future, that is to say, to be crystal clear as to where they see Ukraine heading. Ukrainian leaders have spoken about their intent of creating conditions for the integration of Ukraine into Europe and the Euro-Atlantic institutions. But they have, lately, also talked more about "cooperation" with Europe and the Euro-Atlantic institutions, rather than "inclusion" or "integration." I do not know if this semantic refinement is deliberate or simply the reflection of a quest for verbal innovation, but I would hope that it does not have any deeper significance, because if it does, it implies that even for the elite the process of self-definition is not yet complete. And I personally do not believe that Ukraine can endure as an independent state other than as eventually a member of the European Union and of NATO. Because if it isn't, then what is it? Is it part of some Eurasian space? And if it is part of some Eurasian space, I think it is clear who and how would preponderate in it.

Secondly, I think it's important for Ukraine, which plays and should play a significant role within CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), to be absolutely unambiguous in its repudiation of what is happening in Belarus. Belarus, for many in CIS, and particularly for the leading state in CIS, is a model for the future of Ukraine, that is to say, a state that someday becomes part of a larger Slavic community. I think Ukraine ought to be very clear that the personal dictatorship, the abuse, the actual killings of the opposition in Belarus are incompatible with the proclaimed objectives of the countries that participate in CIS, and that it behooves those countries which have influence in Belarus to clearly disassociate themselves from that, to discourage such practices, to stress that those countries which have an influence in Miensk – and some have much more than others – should press Miensk to move in the direction of greater compatibility with European, indeed, civilized standards of political conduct.

Thirdly, to the extent that Ukraine plays an important role in GUUAM – and that is a potentially an important community of states – Ukraine, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, in effect until recently, Moldova – I think it is important that the scope of that organization gradually be enlarged. It should not be essentially a counter organization within CIS. It should become more of a regional cooperative institution of states which, within a certain geographical space, have common interests – politically, strategically, economically, communicationswise, including energy pipelines. And that means that in addition to membership in GUUAM of CIS states, or former states of the Soviet Union, countries which for different reasons share some of those overlapping interests ought to be at least invited to participate as observers. And I have particularly in mind three: Turkey, Romania and Poland. Each of them has its own relations with the West and aspirations, which would not be incompatible with the aspirations of some of the GUUAM countries; each of them has a stake in stability in the region; each of them has a stake particularly in the role that Ukraine has been playing in GUUAM and in continued independence and security of Ukraine. That would help to fortify that nascent institution. I think it would help to enlarge Ukraine's own regional influence.

It would help to underline, finally, the very simple proposition which I wanted to leave with you today, which is that Ukraine is not Russia.