

Ukrainian Attitudes toward the United States during the Russian Military Intervention

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Abstract: *This article sets out to draw some general conclusions about attitudes toward the United States in contemporary Ukraine, focusing on the period 2014–2017. During this period, critical attitudes toward the US were fueled by Washington’s weak fulfillment of its promises under the Budapest Memorandum (1994) and its failure to meet expectations of American military aid during Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine. At the same time, Ukrainians took a positive view on the general US policy with regard to the Russian war against Ukraine and on American political support for Ukraine more broadly. Traditionally, strong anti-American views have been expressed by the supporters of left-wing forces, but the latter’s influence is clearly declining in post-Euromaidan Ukraine. Negative sentiments toward America continue to be closely correlated with strong pro-Russian and anti-Western views. But on the whole, while neutral attitudes toward America, pro-Americanism, and anti-Americanism are all present in Ukraine, Ukrainians hold mostly positive opinions about America.*

The article also compares Ukrainian attitudes to the US with those to Europe, Russia, and NATO. The authors demonstrate that for the majority of Ukrainians, the main foreign policy priority is in fact not the US, but Europe. Attitudes toward Russia, whether positive or negative, were at one time the principal delineator of self-identification in Ukraine, but today we see a shift whereby the Russian Federation is quickly gaining in importance precisely as the constitutive Other for Ukraine. The US is primarily associated in public opinion either with the West as a whole, or with NATO, which is generally viewed as more important than the US itself. The issue of Ukraine’s orientation toward NATO has often been divisive and controversial in

the past, but from 2014 a positive view on the prospect of NATO membership has come to prevail in Ukrainian society and an orientation towards NATO is now widely viewed as the best way to ensure national security and sovereignty.

Overall, in 2014–2017, Ukrainians were primarily concerned about the war, corruption, and reforms, and had mixed perceptions of foreign involvement in developments in their country (such as the provision of aid to help win the war). Since 2014, after the Russian occupation of Crimea and the invasion of the Donbas, Ukrainians have viewed close relations with both the EU and the US as important, but cooperation with the former is generally viewed as higher priority than with the latter.

Introduction

This article sets out to draw some general conclusions about attitudes toward the United States in contemporary Ukraine, focusing mainly on the period 2014–2017. The research is based on data from public opinion polls, statistical databases, materials used in the pre-election political campaigns, and state documents (for example, those pertaining to Ukraine’s national security strategy and military doctrine). We examine the results of surveys conducted by reputable polling institutions, both international (Gallup Organization, Pew Research Center) and Ukrainian (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, the Gorshenin Institute, the O. Razumkov Ukrainian Center for Economic and Political Research, and Rating Sociological Group, a non-governmental polling organization). All research was based on traditional methods of sociological polling, and all polls conducted since the spring of 2014 excluded the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, territory that is currently occupied by Russia, and the areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts that are controlled by the Russian Federation and Russia-supported separatists (so-called ORDiLO, from “Ukrainian-occupied districts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts”). In most Ukrainian surveys, the following *macro-regions* are marked out: the West, comprising Volyn, Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, L’viv, Ternopil, Chernivtsi, and Rivne oblasts; the Center,