



WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE RELATIONS OF UKRAINE WITH ITS WESTERN NEIGHBORING STATES?

2017

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CONTENTS

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE RELATIONS OF UKRAINE WITH ITS WESTERN NEIGHBORING STATES?.....	4
THE ROLE OF CENTRAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES IN EUROPEAN POLITICS.....	7
THE PLACE OF THE WESTERN NEIGHBORING STATES IN THE FOREIGN POLICY OF UKRAINE.....	11
WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?	22

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE RELATIONS OF UKRAINE WITH ITS WESTERN NEIGHBORING STATES?

A notable deterioration in relations of Ukraine with the three EU and NATO western neighboring states has become **one of the most important issues in 2017**. The acute reaction of neighboring countries to certain historical or linguistic issues, which were not the subject of serious discussions inside the country, became a surprise not only for the general public, but also for a part of the political establishment of our country, who had believed that Ukraine could automatically rely on support of Poland or Hungary in the international arena. Therefore, the explanation for such a new foreign policy challenge for our country has been simplified by a large number of experts and politicians – from accusing the “hand of the Kremlin” of these issues to criticisms for the internal political situation in these countries and the upcoming elections, after which all problems connected with Ukraine will supposedly disappear.

Such a simplistic and superficial attitude towards the causes of serious conflicts in relations with neighboring countries is dangerous and may cause new «unpleasant surprises» for Ukraine in the nearest future. Incorrect assessment of the causes of each conflict in particular as well as the lack of systematic state analysis in general can lead to false inferences. The price of political decisions, taken on such basis, may be too high for our country, which is currently in difficult international conditions and in a state of an open military conflict with the Russian Federation. Therefore, it is extremely important to give an honest and maximally impartial answer to the question: What is the reason for the current tension in relations with the western neighboring states? Is it only in certain issues of history or the language of education at schools? Are these issues only a “tip of the iceberg”, a manifestation of other, much more important, systemic problems?

From our point of view, the phenomena of crisis in relations with the neighbors on the western border of our country reflect certain crisis of both Ukrainian foreign policy identity in general, and Ukrainian “Neighborhood Policy” in particular. The latter is conditioned by insufficient attention to the development of relations with western neighbors during last years, the lack of a systematic analysis of the internal situation in neighboring countries, their positions and interests regarding regional cooperation, the lack of a well-developed regional policy of Ukraine, in particular regarding the involvement of all public authorities, businesses and interested civil society representatives and expert communities of every neighboring country into partnership development policy. The absence of such policies and the deterioration of relations with neighboring countries not only constitute a problem in the context of relations of Ukraine with the EU or NATO, but, more importantly, is particularly dangerous in the context of a systemic conflict in the eastern direction – with Russian Federation. Taking into account the positioning of Belarus, which adheres to the priority of the allied relations with Russian Federation, as well as rather complicated, complex and multidimensional nature of policy of Turkey in the region and towards our country, the cost of failures in relations with western neighbors may be critical.

That is why, one of the key challenges facing Ukrainian foreign policy is an urgent analysis of the state of relations with neighboring countries and the development of recommendations that would prevent their further deterioration as well as ideally help to improve the atmosphere and the practical filling of bilateral partnership as soon as possible. At the same time, it is crucial **that in the process of working out such a policy several factors** influencing the state of relations and development of political decisions concerning our western neighboring states are taken into account. First of all, we are talking about such factors as an *asymmetry* and *hierarchy*.

The asymmetric nature of the relations between Ukraine and western neighboring countries is determined by the fact that the role of these countries for Ukraine for a number of reasons is much more important than the role of Ukraine for them, consequently the price paid by Ukraine for deteriorating relations with its western neighbors is much higher. Such a humiliating asymmetry for Ukraine is determined not only by the difference in the economic development of these countries and our state during the last decade, but by the severity and scale of the challenges faced by Ukraine. Russian aggression, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas are the questions of survival for Ukraine and its preservation on the map of Europe. There is no such a challenge before any of our neighboring countries.

This is also connected with the **factor of hierarchy** of these challenges for each of the parties. For none of the neighboring countries the issue of Ukraine is the main one in context of their domestic or foreign policy priorities. Even for the Polish politicians, the saying “there is no free Poland without free Ukraine” does not sound like a fundamental truth any more. Ukrainian issues have become, for each particular country, a part or addition to other, more important issues of domestic or foreign policy, a problem the solution of which depends on or connected with more important tasks – the support its own diaspora, relations with the United States, EU or NATO, or relations with Russia, etc. When dealing with a position of Ukraine, neighboring countries will take into account not only the balance of advantages and disadvantages, gains or losses in relations with our country, but they will consider a much wider balance of consequences when taking any decisions. And the problem here is that even the best ideas or suggestions from our side, proposed now, may no longer outweigh the pros and cons of more important factors for these countries, in the decision-making process concerning Ukraine. Accordingly, this can have both positive and negative consequences for Ukraine.

Adequate development of the policy of Ukraine towards neighboring states is impossible without an objective assessment of the role of our western neighbors in the region as well as in the European Union.

THE ROLE OF CENTRAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES IN EUROPEAN POLITICS

Estimations, expressed by a significant part of the Ukrainian establishment in the process of scandals deployment regarding relations with Poland or Hungary this year, have shown that the obsolete stereotypes about neighboring countries and their current role in the EU, European politics and economy in general prevail in Ukraine.

First of all, it should be noted that the countries of Central Europe are gaining more and more economic weight within the EU. Joining the EU contributed to stabilization of their economies, and EU subsidies – to restoration of infrastructure, creation of workplaces and increase of welfare of citizens. As a result of EU assistance and responsible economic policy, the new EU member states show **higher** GDP growth rates than Western European countries (by 2–3%). In particular, Romania is the EU leader in terms of GDP growth (8.8%). High GDP growth rates are also reported by Czech Republic (5%), Poland (4.9%) and Hungary (3.9%), while Germany (2.8%), France (2.2%), Italy (1.7%) and other countries of “old Europe” have considerably lower indicators¹. In addition, the countries of Central Europe have rather low unemployment rates: Czech Republic (2.7%), Hungary (4.1%), Poland (4.6%), Romania (4.9%)², which was the result of labor resources emigration to the UK and other Western European countries, as well as the result of the economic growth of these countries.

¹ GDP Annual Growth Rate. Trading Economics <https://tradingeconomics.com/country-list/gdp-%20annual-growth-%20rate?continent=europe>

² Unemployment rates, seasonally adjusted, October 2017. Eurostat [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Unemployment_rates_seasonally_adjusted_October_2017_\(%25\)_F2.png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Unemployment_rates_seasonally_adjusted_October_2017_(%25)_F2.png)

It should be noted separately that despite the insistence of the EU, the governments of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic oppose the transition to the Euro, justifying their hesitation by economic disparities between the old and new members of the EU, as well as the reluctance to share financial responsibility for the economies of the weak European countries. Among the neighbors of Ukraine, only Slovakia has joined the Eurozone, and Romania named the year 2022 as the date of possible transition to the Euro, because, according to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania Teodor Melescanu, this would have a negative impact on the poorest sections of the population³.

In its turn, the economic weight of the new EU member states enhances their self-confidence and political ambitions on the regional and European arena. Having won due to non-joining the Eurozone and the differences in economic policy from the old member states, the nationalistic and euro-skeptic feelings increased among the political elites of Central European countries. The positions of Central European countries, especially Poland and Hungary, are becoming louder against the background of **contradictions within the EU**, caused by financial problems, migration crisis, Brexit and the EU reforming.

At present, the contradictions between these countries and Brussels are very serious, and in some cases they are critical. But, if in the 1990s the “diktat” of Brussels was perceived as fully understood and justified now it is causing significant resistance within these countries. Hungary and Poland have tensions with the EU leadership that accuse their governments of violating the rule of law, limiting civil liberties or conducting controversial judicial reform. At the same time, according to recent

³ Szef rumuńskiego MSZ: Mamy zaufanie do tego co robią polskie władze. Rzeczpospolita, 27.08.2017 <http://www.rp.pl/Unia-Europejska/308279952-%20Szef-rumunskiego-%20MSZ-Mamy-%20zaufanie-do-%20tego-co-%20robi%C5%82-polskie-%20w%C5%82adze.html>

polls, “Fidesz”⁴ and “Prawo i Sprawiedliwość”⁵ – ruling parties in these countries – are supported by 51% of Hungarians and 45% of Poles, respectively. These parties, which are opposed to Brussels’s interference in internal affairs, have a great support from voters. The ideology success of these parties, based on a mixture of conservative, populist and Eurosceptic ideas, suggests the support of similar views among the population of these countries.

In fact, the Visegrad countries have formed a sort of “Eurosceptic bloc” within the European Union and often strongly oppose the countries of the European “core”. While France, Germany and Italy favor the idea of closer European integration, Central European countries want to see the EU as a trade bloc and a sovereign union – the position that was hitherto supported by Britain, which is the main current “problem” of the EU.

At the same time, Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic are critical of EU intervention in domestic and economic issues. The adoption of migration quotas by the European Commission in September 2015 deepened the split between the old and new members of the EU. In accordance with the plan for the redistribution of 160,000 asylum seekers, the EU has obliged Poland to host 11946 migrants, Romania – 6351, Czech Republic – 4306, Slovakia – 2287, and Hungary – 8,276⁶. However, the governments of these countries categorically refuse to carry out migration quotas based on lower financial possibilities and fears about inter-confessional conflicts. In September 2017, the Court of Justice of the European Union rejected the complaints of Hungary and Slovakia regarding migration quotas. Instead, in December 2017, the European Commission lodged a com-

⁴ Tovább erősödött a Fidesz-KDNP. Századvég, 2017. December 8. <https://szazadveg.hu/hu/kutatások/az-%20alapítvány-kutatasai/piackutatas-%20kozvelemeney-kutatas/tovabb-%20erosodott-a-%20fidesz-kdnp>

⁵ Najnowszy Sondaż partyjny. Aż 7 partii w Sejmie. SE.pl, 15.12.2017 http://www.se.pl/wiadomosci/polityka/najnowszy-sondaz-partyjny-az-7-partii-w-sejmie_1032384.html

⁶ MAPPED: How many refugees each European country will take under EU plans. Sunday Express, Sep 23, 2015 <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/607349/Migrant-crisis-map-EU-refugee-quota>

plaint with the EU Court against Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic for non-fulfillment of migration obligations.

The unwillingness to introduce the Euro or to carry out migration quotas shows that these countries will seek such EU reforming, which will maximally preserve national sovereignty, especially in the financial sphere and migration policy. Moreover, after a serious EU injection into the CEE countries and their access to the trajectory of economic growth, there are not much left advantages that could have forced them to fulfill the “dictat” of Brussels – and their volume is decreasing.

The exit of the UK from the EU, in particular, will significantly affect the interests of Central European countries. First of all, Brexit would mean a reduction in EU subsidies to Poland, Hungary and other countries, many of which were formed at the expense of the UK financial contribution. Secondly, there is a question about the fate of migrants among the citizens of the new EU member states who work in the UK. Thirdly, the UK played a balancing role equilibrating the influence of France and Germany on EU policies. As a result, without the political support of Great Britain, the Central European countries will become more vulnerable to the pressure of Berlin, Paris and Brussels in many European policy issues. For these reasons, Central European countries seek to more actively influence the course of negotiations on Brexit in order to maximally protect the national interests and interests of their citizens after the unpleasant “divorce” with London.

Thus, we have a situation in the EU in the context of the relations between the “old” and the “new” Europe, which is significantly different from the one that existed in the 1990s or even in the 2000s. On the one hand, the CEE countries have already become a sufficiently independent and powerful influence factor on the continent with a much clearer understanding of their own national interests, on the other – these interests do not

necessarily repeat the logic which Germany and other countries of the “old” Europe treated them with in the process of enlargement. Instead of “obedient students and followers” in the EU, confident in their strengths of youth the “Central European tigers” have appeared having their own agenda and being able to “show their sharp teeth” in return to pressure from their older comrades. In the corridors of the European Commission, it is already enough loudly discussed that after solving the Euro and Brexit issues, it will be necessary to teach a good lesson to those countries that “have grown too fast”.

And precisely this moment of “maturity”, the change of the European integration paradigm of the 1990s, and self-perception of the countries of Central Europe was not noticed in Ukraine, which continued to perceive the EU and its western neighbors within foreign policy constructions of twenty years ago.

THE PLACE OF THE WESTERN NEIGHBORING STATES IN THE FOREIGN POLICY OF UKRAINE

Despite the importance of western neighboring states, none of the Ukrainian normative documents contains a neighborhood policy as a separate policy area. Thus, the Law of Ukraine “On the Principles of Internal and External Policies” dated 2010 consists of the general goals, priorities and rules of international cooperation, which to a large extent do not meet the current requirements. In this Law, neighboring states are indirectly mentioned in the context of “preventing conflicts in the regions bordering on Ukraine and resolving existing conflicts”⁷.

Instead, the western neighboring states of Ukraine have the formulated foreign policy goals and priorities, as well as the vision of the place of our state in accordance with their national interests. “Polish Foreign Policy Strategy 2017–2021” considers

⁷ Закон України «Про засади внутрішньої і зовнішньої політики». Редакція від 30.11.2017
<http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2411-17>

the neighborhood policy through the prism of national security. The Polish Neighborhood Policy includes, among others, the following objectives: strengthening security cooperation with Eastern European countries and supporting their resilience to crises; cooperation with the Baltic States and Romania in order to strengthen eastern flank of NATO; cooperation within the framework of the Visegrad Battlegroup and the Polish-Lithuanian-Ukrainian Brigade, enhancement of Polish-Ukrainian defense cooperation⁸. Romania is also considering the Neighborhood Policy as a separate foreign policy area that covers Moldova, the Western Balkans, Ukraine and the Black Sea region⁹.

Due to the lack of expertise in this direction, the Ukrainian elite and society have a simplistic perception of political processes in Central European countries and do not always understand the interests of Poland, Hungary and Romania in the international arena. In turn, the reaction of certain Ukrainian socio-political figures to the decisions of the western neighboring states can complicate already difficult bilateral relations.

The important political, economic and security significance that Poland, Hungary, Romania and Slovak Republic have for Ukraine was perceived as an axiom and as given in the foreign policy of Ukraine. Poland and Hungary were the first to recognize the independence of Ukraine on December, 2 and 3, 1991, when all western neighboring states did not tire to repeat the thesis about their support of Ukraine and its European aspirations. After the Ukrainian-Polish reconciliation during the presidency of Kuchma and Kwasniewski, it seemed that relations with these countries could not have been spoiled. All the views of Kyiv, as well as those of Warsaw and Budapest, were focused on the West, where the answers on the key issues for Ukrainian foreign policy were found. The entry of western

⁸ Polish Foreign Policy Strategy 2017–2021, Ministry of Foreign Affairs <http://www.msz.gov.pl/resource/0c98c3b2-%209c5d-4c42-%208761-f7827134ee76:JCR>

⁹ Key policy areas of Romania, Ministry of Foreign Affairs <https://www.mae.ro/en/taxonomy/term/558/2>

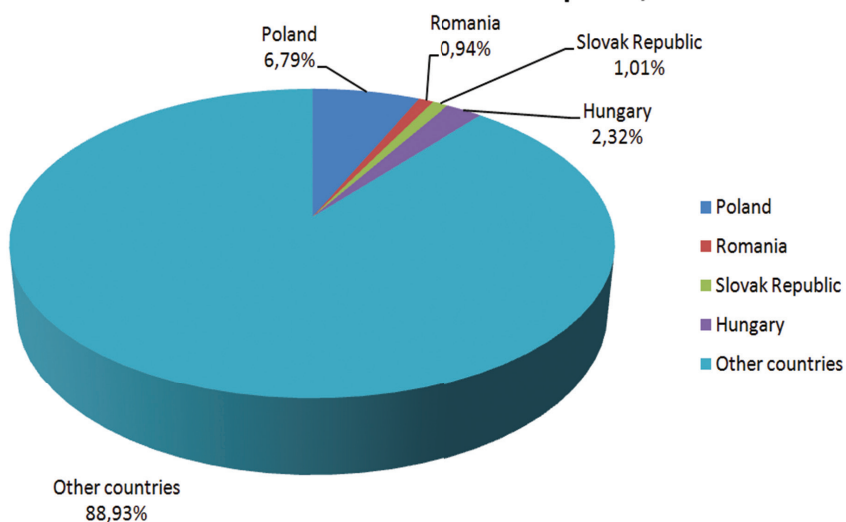
neighboring states to NATO and EU has considerably strengthened Ukraine's position in dialogue with the "old" Europe. Unlike France, Germany, Italy and other countries of Western Europe, Central European countries have always advocated the prospect of EU membership for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. In Kyiv, it was realized that the reason for this was fears against Russians, and Ukraine was perceived as the barrier on this way by some neighbors. The concern for their own minorities was important for others – or just the European narrative of the 1990s for the third. Neighboring countries were further perceived as "equal", the same recipients of aid from the rich and strong West as Ukraine, though, a little more successful. Their transformation from the status of petitioners to the status of almost equal to other European countries, from the camp of Euro-optimists to the camp of Euro-skeptics has happened almost unnoticed. Even the somewhat unexpected proposal of the Polish side, which pulled out the concept of "Wider Europe" from the British diplomats and redefined it with Sweden into the Eastern Partnership initiative, was not surprising. Although even a superficial analysis of the Eastern Partnership showed that this is not a way to a new stage in the enlargement of the EU, it does not open additional prospects for Ukraine, but rather reflects the geopolitical ambitions of Poland. Ukraine has continued to perceive its western neighboring states according to a "residual" principle: the main partners for resolving key issues from the West are Washington, Brussels, Berlin, maybe Paris, while Warsaw and other CEE countries are friends who will always support. Therefore, when Russian aggression began, all the attention was drawn to the position of Washington-Brussels-Berlin-Paris. Including Warsaw into settlement or at least consulting process has not even occurred to Kyiv. Ukrainian officials did not get tired to repeat where appropriate and not very much that we are dripping with blood for all of Europe and, above all, for our western neighbors, in confrontation with

Russia. The question that the Poles or Hungarians could quite differently perceive themselves, Europe and us at present did not come to mind to the Ukrainian authorities. That is why the scandals in those relations resembled a bolt from the blue for the Ukrainian leadership.

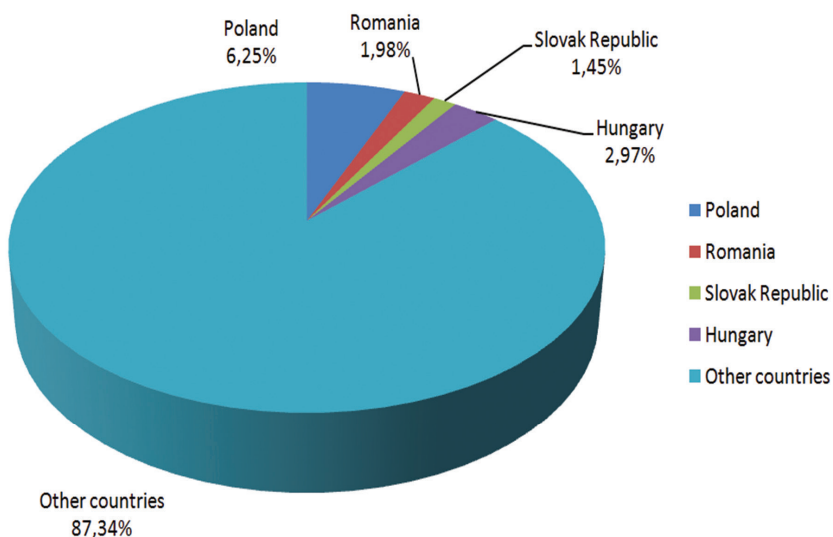
In Kyiv, not only the transformation of neighboring states was de facto ignored, but also the transformation of the attitude of own citizens towards these states. As of today, Central European countries are increasingly becoming a magnet for Ukrainian migrants, commensurated with Italy or Canada. So, in 2016, Poland issued 512,000 residence permits for citizens of Ukraine, the Czech Republic – 24 thousand, the Slovak Republic – 3 thousand, Lithuania – 2,8 thousand, Hungary – 2,3 thousand. Money transfers of Ukrainian migrants from Poland and Czech Republic are an important source of income for hundreds of thousands families in Ukraine. Labor migration has clearly demonstrated the increasingly deeper gap between Ukraine and its western neighboring states. But, according to the acting Foreign Minister of Ukraine, labor migration is “a labor force for the Polish economy that needs it” rather than a tragedy for hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian families and evidence of the problems and weaknesses of the Ukrainian state.

The transformation of neighboring states and real situation of relations with them is characterized by the trade situation. Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Hungary account for 12.5% of Ukrainian exports and 11% of Ukrainian imports, which is an indirect indicator of good neighboring relations. At the same time, trade with Poland that is our main partner has a negative balance that is not in the favor of Ukraine. Such role of Ukraine in the economy of neighboring states and vice versa – their role in our economic development – also allows us to objectively evaluate mutual weight and significance not on the political and declarative, but on the pragmatic level.

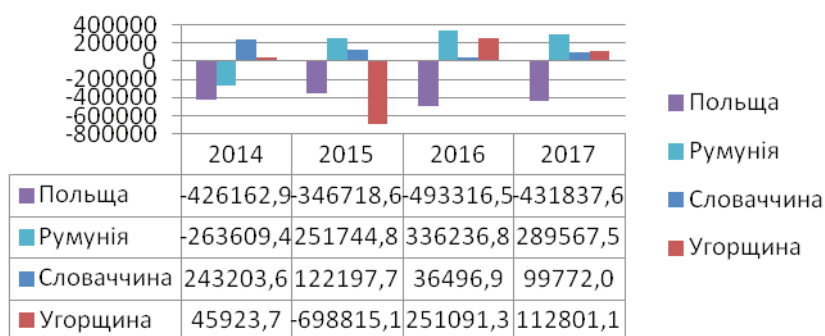
Share of countries in Ukraine's imports, %



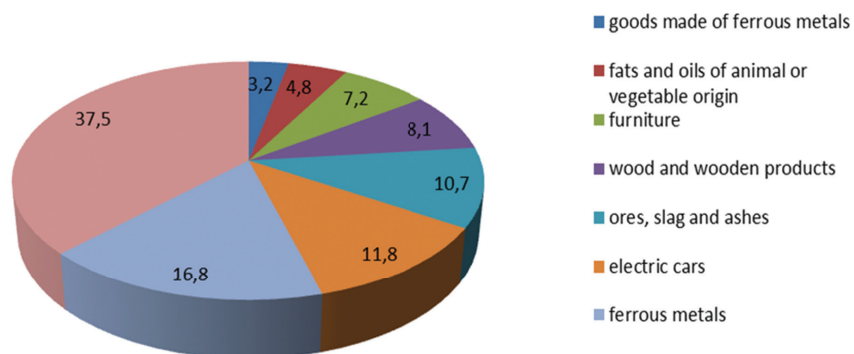
Share of countries in Ukraine's exports, %



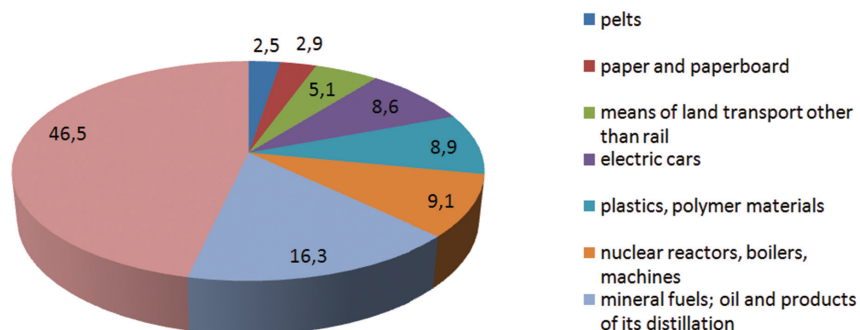
Trade surplus, thosand USD



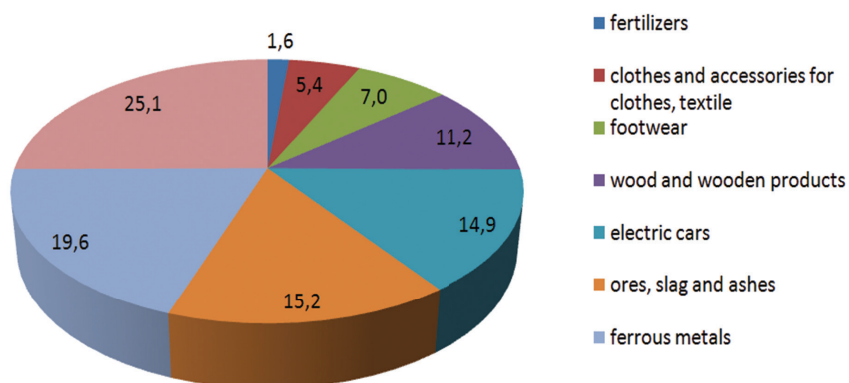
Commodity structure of Ukraine's exports to Poland, %



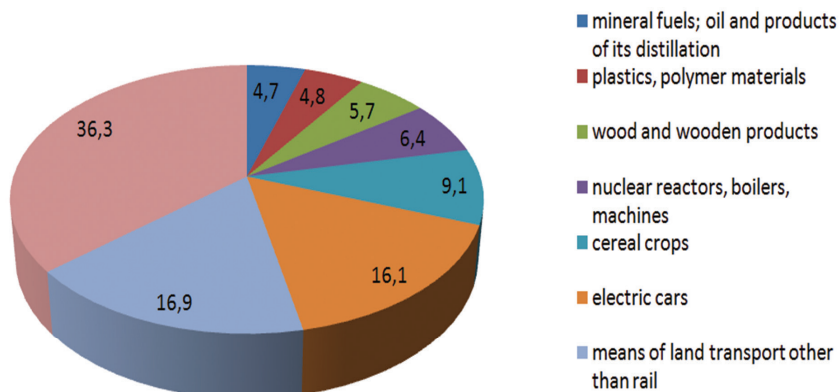
Commodity structure of Ukraine's imports to Poland, %



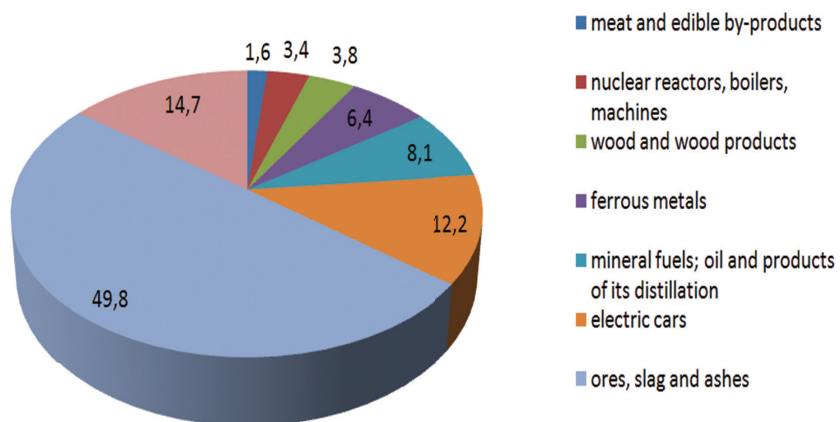
Commodity structure of Ukraine's exports to Romania, %



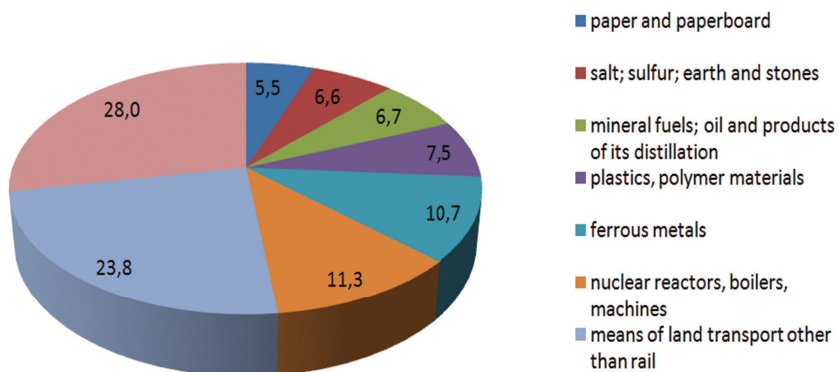
Commodity structure of Ukraine's imports to Romania, %



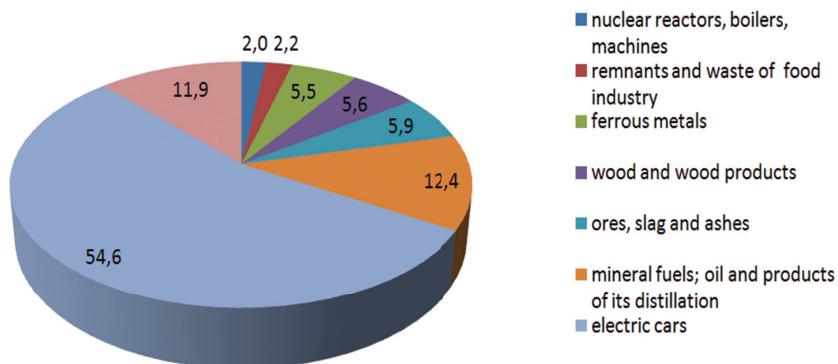
Commodity structure of Ukraine's exports to the Slovak Republic, %



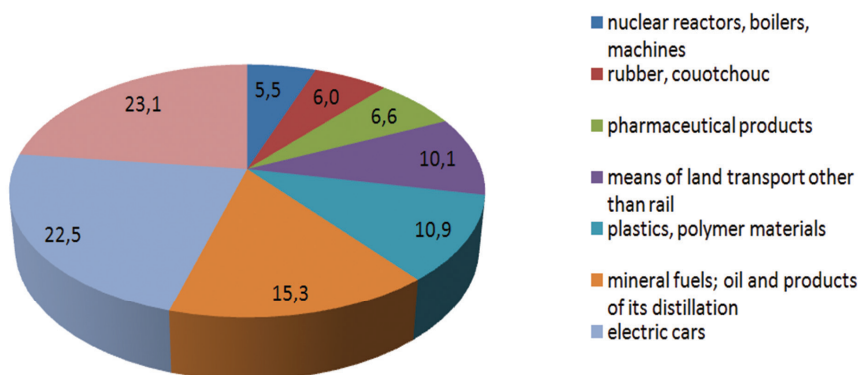
Commodity structure of Ukraine's imports to the Slovak Republic, %



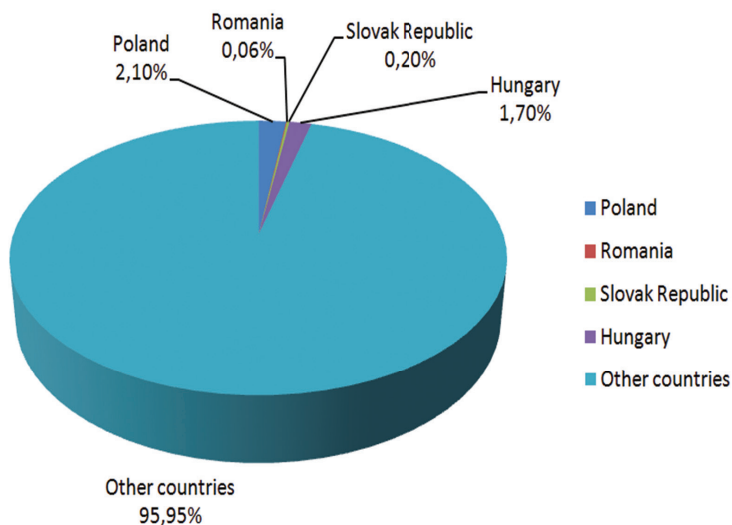
Commodity structure of Ukraine's exports to Hungary, %



Commodity structure of Ukraine's imports to Hungary, %



Share of countries' investments in Ukraine's economy, %



As we can see from the indicated figures, the weight of the western neighboring states in trade turnover and investment remains insufficient, while the weight of Ukraine in the indicators of these countries is even lower. What then serves as the ground, the basis of good neighboring relations of Ukraine and its western neighboring states? Military and political alliance? No, these countries are members of NATO, which will secure them from a Russian threat. Trade and economic relations? No, as we have seen, these countries finally turned to the EU, and trade with Ukraine has a small value for them. Energy security? After two gas wars between Ukraine and Russia, the CEE countries were able to build a sufficient number of interconnectors and are now formally exporting gas to Ukraine. They are also not satisfied with the Nord Stream, but energy security has ceased to be a priority factor in the context of Ukraine. Human relations, common history, national minorities? Yes, in fact, for these countries, in addition to geographical proximity, the place and role of Ukraine is determined by humanitarian component. Moreover, for the euro-skeptic, conservative, nationalist ruling elites of these countries, such concepts as language, history, and diaspora are not empty words but a vital component of their present political identity. And if there are problems in this area not counterbalanced by advantages in other areas, but on the contrary – added to other problems, then should one expect something else than a crisis like the one unfolded in 2017.

The Ukrainian-Polish historical contradictions and the Ukrainian-Hungarian linguistic conflict are only a reflection of the deep-seated crisis of neighborhood relations. Problems in bilateral relations between Ukraine and its western neighboring states have wider and deeper dimensions. The main reason is the outdated vision of the role of the western neighboring states of Ukraine. The idea that Central European countries have unlimited solidarity with Ukraine, given the Kremlin pressure on them collectively in the past, communist totalitarianism

and repression, the difficulties of the transit period, the desire to “return” to Europe and other still dominates in Ukraine. However, after joining the EU, the interests of the western neighboring states began to diverge further from Ukraine. Instead, governments and societies of these countries are now mainly concerned with internal problems or defending their own interests at the EU level, while support for Ukraine is provided largely due to the desire to improve their own security and well-being.

What should be done?

Given the complication of bilateral relations between Ukraine and its western neighboring states, Kyiv needs to take a number of urgent steps in order to increase mutual trust in 2018:

1. Adoption of a new concept of the foreign policy of Ukraine

Ukraine should rethink the goals and priorities of foreign policy, taking into account the current internal and external challenges and dynamic processes in the world, Europe and neighboring countries. In particular, Kyiv needs to get rid of the illusions concerning “eternal” allies and treat the western neighbors rather as pragmatic partners. A hierarchy of problems, tasks and challenges faced by Ukraine in its relations with neighboring states has to be defined. Even when facing a real threat from the western side, we must clearly identify: what is the main threat and problem is for Ukraine, what is the greatest challenge to our security? Accordingly, it is necessary to build a strategy of relations and tactics of resolution for each particular issue. It is impossible to go on a conflict in the western direction because the important but rather secondary issue, compared with the war in the east of the country.

2. Development of a new “Neighborhood Policy”

Relations with neighboring states should be governed by a separate concept that reflects the current situation in Ukraine and the role of the western neighbors in ensuring the national interests of Ukraine. This document should contain the objectives of the Ukrainian Neighborhood Policy and the scope of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. We have to seek the most positive and trouble-free approach in the relations with all neighbors; seek compromises, and address the problematic issues in highly specialized formats to avoid irritants. The main task of the new Neighborhood Policy should be seen in expanding basis for partnership and cooperation with neighboring countries.

3. Depoliticization of humanitarian issues

Political forces and certainly representatives of executive authorities have to avoid using interstate contradictions for personal or corporate purposes. At the same time, historical questions should be left to historians and the law on education – to lawyers and educators. At the same time, such depoliticization should take place symmetrically, and therefore will depend on the readiness of the other party.

4. Focus on areas of common interest

Kyiv should offer a positive agenda for bilateral relations, focusing on areas of common interest both for Ukraine and its western neighbors: regional security, energy cooperation, cross-border cooperation, transport infrastructure. The activation of prospective fields of bilateral cooperation will increase the value of Ukraine as a partner and neighbor and will reduce the possibility of using the “Ukrainian question” for domestic political purposes in these countries.

5. Strengthening of economic cooperation

First of all, Ukraine needs to show itself as a reliable and beneficial trade and economic partner. So, the Ukrainian government should implement systemic reforms and launch the Association Agreement. The interest of eastern neighbors in economic and business cooperation with Ukraine will increase in case of a visible increase in the competitiveness of Ukrainian goods in world markets, the liberalization of economic policy and the simplification of business rules.

6. Enhancing of Border Cooperation

Cross-border cooperation has significant potential for intensifying practical cooperation with neighboring countries and should be identified as one of the key priorities for both central government and regional administrations and local self-government bodies. However, the focus of cross-border cooperation should be directed to projects with a fast-reaching result that will seriously change the atmosphere and practical filling of the relationship. For example, the priority should be the launch of joint border control and customs control between Ukraine and neighboring countries, maximum simplification of border and customs control. This priority will obviously cause serious opposition of those, who benefits from such a “business” today, and also will require considerable efforts to restore confidence between the parties. But with the presence of political will and pressure, the launch of joint control and simplified border crossing is possible in the near future and therefore will have a systemic positive impact on cooperation with its neighbors, will be a tangible manifestation of improved partnership for the citizens of both countries, and will promote economic activation and reduce the “shadowing” at the border.

7. Development of border infrastructure

Another priority for the Ukrainian side is the development of the border infrastructure, which is increasingly degrading against the background of the successful completion of the access routes from Poland or Hungary. European and international financial institutions will be pleased to join the financing of these projects, but the interest from the Ukrainian side is needed. The speed of implementation of existing border cooperation projects within the framework of EU-funded programs, as well as their scope and depth of use of funds for the development of Ukrainian infrastructure, cannot be considered as satisfactory. It is necessary to determine the development of the border infrastructure as a national priority, the work of the Cabinet of Ministers and relevant departments with specific tasks and timelines for their implementation should be focused on it.

8. Involvement of Ukraine in regional initiatives

Regional initiatives have recently become the subject of special attention for the political elites of neighboring countries. These are initiatives supported by higher-level players – “The Great Silk Road” with China or the “Three Seas Initiative” from the United States, as well as own initiatives of neighboring countries. The absence of Ukraine in both of the above-mentioned initiatives is an evidence of systemic mistakes and underdevelopments of domestic diplomacy. The discussion of initiatives, such as the Polish concept “Intermarium” has been left for the enthusiasts from the public sector. Involvement of Ukraine into regional initiatives should become a key priority for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and new ideas that will strengthen the regional identity of Ukraine must be strongly encouraged. Moreover, it is necessary to get involved into these initiatives not only as those, who need help or with anti-Russian rhetoric, but with clear

proposals for the development of transport routes, simplification of logistics, construction of new regional projects, etc. Participation of Ukraine should become constructive and have an added value for regional initiatives, rather than burdening them with own problems.

9. National minorities should become an advantage of Ukrainian neighborhood policy, rather than a problem

The dialogue with Ukrainian national minorities as well as with the minorities of neighboring states should be intensified. They should be perceived as connectors, bridging neighboring countries, as important channels of communication and cooperation but not hostile groups on own territory. It is necessary to conduct dialogue with minorities only through the positive way, including in the context of implementing the recommendations of the Venice Commission, intensify the study of the Ukrainian language, but to avoid steps that are perceived as those weakening the role of minority languages.

10. Activation of cultural diplomacy

Ukraine should intensify relations not only at the intergovernmental and interdepartmental level, but also to develop interpersonal relations. Regular common cultural events, communication with the Polish, Hungarian and Romanian audiences should promote the image of Ukraine in the neighboring countries.

