

Debate on Foreign Policy Choice in the Media Landscape of Ukraine

Denys Yakovlev * [0000-0003-2828-4669], Artur Amirov [0000-0003-4030-1222],
Anastasiia Stoliarova [0000-0001-8962-5776]

National University «Odesa Law Academy», Odesa, Ukraine

* yakovlevdenys@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The paper is devoted to the study of political debates in the mass media on Ukraine's foreign policy choice. The political debate in the mass media about the foreign policy choice today concerns not only the existential dilemma of the Ukrainian establishment "East – West", which has its roots in history. Ukraine's foreign policy choice defines European and Euro-Atlantic integration at the level of consensus of the ruling class, it is enshrined in the legal field. Strategic choice is made. The focus of the political debate is the requirement of rational justification of the steps' sequence and the combination of political, legal and economic dimensions of integration, the realization of national interest. Without political debate in the mass media, it is impossible to solve the dilemmas of foreign policy choice: 1) regarding the connection between European and Euro-Atlantic integration (their pace, priority, level of interconnection and mutual conditionality); 2) on the national and local level of interaction, determining the role of public diplomacy and local self-government in the process of European integration; 3) on globalism and national interest. The main challenges that hinder the development of political debates in the mass media have been identified: the mediatization of politics, the oligarchic model of the Ukrainian mass media, the distortion of political discussions during media shows and the reduction of political competition to media scandals. The main difficulty is that the subject of rational political debate in the mass media during all the years of independence has not been to determine the essence of national interest, and hence – the directions of its implementation and protection in the process of European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Keywords: *political debate, mass media, foreign policy, mediatization, foreign policy choice.*

What's happening
Tagline of Twitter

1. INTRODUCTION

For post-Soviet societies on the frontier of civilization, overcoming the totalitarian legacy is an important task. This implies a rejection of "imperial" policy and should be taken into account in the debate on Ukraine's foreign policy choice. With every new year of independence and a new government, the risk of remaining a "transitional", "divided" society and a failed state increases [1]. Border zone in modern conditions is not just a geographical term. It has political connotations and means difficult reforms, intentions for "open access" [2], rejection of authoritarianism in politics and oligarchic monopolies in

the economy. Recession and demodernization are not the best advertising agents for democracy. EU and NATO integration is hampered by the need for simultaneous disintegration with Soviet totalitarianism and the post-imperial legacy. The systemic and pervasive ideological indoctrination [3] of the Communist Party, which has prevented rational political debate in the past, has given way to the challenges of mediatization of politics and imitation of pluralism in the mass media system, which is controlled by oligarchic groups. The existing media landscape does not contribute to a rational debate on Ukraine's foreign policy choice. This fully applies to the

political landscape. Electoral campaigns are competitive, but debates are replaced by political shows and media scandals. The European and Euro-Atlantic vector of integration is sporadically questioned in political discourse. That is why the study of Ukraine's foreign policy choice concerns mainly domestic rather than European policy: the vector choice of integration is still about "us" and not about "them".

In the context of globalization, the main task for each "transit" country is to find its own place. At the intersection of external and internal factors – globalization and the struggle for power in the middle of the country, Ukrainian society is looking for an optimal integration model. Can debate contribute to this? Given the dynamics of development of social networks in Ukrainian society, the Twitter's [4-6] slogan "What's happening" (which is written in the epigraph of this paper) becomes especially relevant. It is argued to answer the question "what's going on?" regarding Ukraine's foreign policy choice is possible only on the basis of rational political debates.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is conditioned by the search for a rational alternative to endogenous factors that today influence foreign policy choice. We are talking about the mediatization of politics, their oligarchization, the specifics of political debates in post-Soviet politics, the hybrid media political system, and so on. Firstly, there is opposition of the political debate to the mediatization of politics in the global context and oligarchic media system in Ukraine. The theory of mediatization specifies significant challenges for the interaction of media and politics [7]. They consist in predominance of media logic in political discussions, distortion of political communications under the influence of entertaining political shows and media scandals. "Mediated worlds" are formed [8]. Secondly, determining the specifics of the debate on foreign policy choice in the post-Soviet context. The creation of a hybrid of mass media and political system is a consequence of incomplete transition from the Soviet to the democratic political system [9, 10]. Given the institutional dimension of democratization [11, 12], the authors note that the institutional reconstruction of the mass media focused on the oligarchic model [13]. Within the framework of neo-institutionalism, the influence of debates during election campaigns on Ukraine's foreign policy choice has been determined. "The political history of Ukraine has known examples not only of "constitutional reversals "and transitions from the majority to the proportional and mixed electoral model, but also significant transformations of foreign policy as a result of the election campaign" [14].

3. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

Debates on Ukraine's foreign policy choice have now been virtually eliminated from the media. This is due to the following factors.

1. The specifics of the modern media landscape of Ukraine. It is not civil (on the contrary, it can be called "uncivil") and does not contribute to rational political debate. The media landscape is determined by the owners of the media – the oligarchs, who follow their own ("private") economic and political interests, rather than the national interest. The oligarchic media landscape (as a hybrid of power and property) is characterized by irrationality through the active use of media scandals and political shows as tools of political confrontation. That is why there is no representation of the interests of society and the citizens' positions in the media landscape, and "electoral democracy" does not allow us to approach the goal of European integration, which is consolidated democracy and economic growth. It should be emphasized: "The candidate becomes an actor who is shown to the public as part of a great performance. The image created for the public is the so-called "imaginary face", which should carry positive emotions, leaves space only for a monologue (at best – prepared answers to questions from positive journalists or citizens), which turns the race from election to theater. A practical alternative to this phenomenon could be a dialogue between politicians in the form of political debates. Debates can be understood as public competitions between politicians with a special structure and rules. In the model of competitive political dialogue, a special role belongs to the mass media, which acts as a mediator, observer of the rules of debate. The difference between debate and competition is the observance of rules, the unwillingness to tolerate deception" [15].

2. Global transformations of the media landscape [16]. The role (along with the budget, audience and quality of content) of traditional mass media is declining. The press, radio and television are losing influence. Accordingly, the format of television debates, which has been familiar to several generations and which does not currently meet the requirements of the media market, is a thing of the past. The Media Landscape Attempting to convey a clear picture of the modern media landscape is like trying to draw a hurricane from within the storm [16]. Leaders of each Media thought that the latest new technology would foreordain them, yet many survived and adapted. The sense that future is unknowable cannot be used as justification for failing to understand what is happening around us now – when history has shown that in transformative moments like this, decisions of policymakers and industry leaders resonate for decades. The main trend in the media landscape is the development of social networks [17].

Along with the positive changes, such as efficiency (speed), openness, locality, interactivity, there are also negative consequences. In social networks there is a deprofessionalization of information creation. Rational debates can be forgotten here. Rather, there are ersatz debates: the aim of which is to humiliate the opponent, publicly demonstrate disrespect, and be too emotional. It is not the quality of information that comes to the fore, but the number of reactions to it. The transformation of the media landscape requires the search for and implementation of a new model of debate that would take into account the specifics of social networks and, at the same time, allow maintaining the rationality of political discussions. The paradigm shift is called "microjournalism": passive consumers of information become active creators of the information field [17]. At the same time, the weight of global media corporations is growing [18]. No one can compete with them at the national level.

3. The format of election campaigns constructed in Ukraine does not require a rational debate between candidates to win. This issue is not regulated at the legislative level either. The only exception is the debate between the candidates for the post of President of Ukraine, who reached the second round. Instead, debate is an important mechanism of political competition. Regarding the post-election debates, we emphasize that "they were formed in the conditions of the government "resetting", defining new priorities of domestic and foreign policy, finding answers to questions about the essence of national interest, etc.... Gradually opposition political leaders move away from the "information shock", connected with Volodymyr Zelenskyi's result in the second round of the presidential election, the victory of the "Servant of the People" party in the parliamentary elections and the formation of a "mono-majority" in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine [19]. The media top topics, which should become the agenda of rational debates on Ukraine's foreign policy choice, include: "First, Ukraine's interaction with key partners and international players. Second, the provision of international assistance in combating "hybrid aggression". Third, support from the EU and NATO for Ukraine's chosen European and Euro-Atlantic course " [19]. For example, the material "Mirror of the Week": "Stoltenberg called Ukraine and Georgia the closest NATO partners. According to the summit program, a meeting "Welcome back. Dialogue with officials"... However, the Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orban has stated that he will block any decision on the Ukraine-Georgia-NATO line, which will be adopted during the NATO summit" [20].

4. The foundation of the debate on foreign policy choice should be the definition of national interest and the delineation of ways to implement it in the process of European and Euro-Atlantic integration and post-Soviet

disintegration. "On the one hand, the political class has finally made a choice in favor of European values, European and Euro-Atlantic integration. On the other hand, for objective reasons, the processes of disintegration with the Russian Federation and all countries that continue to identify with the post-Soviet economic, socio-cultural and political space are currently accelerating. The overriding task of foreign policy at the present stage is the synthesis of integration and disintegration processes, when the lost ties must be replaced by new partnerships and opportunities" (Dilemmas of Ukraine's foreign policy through the prism of international relations theories). There are also problems with determining the national interest. After all, the national interest cannot be reduced to a narrow group interest, party or class. It synthesizes economic, political, cultural interests, needs and values. The national interest can be defined as "consolidated result of intellectual search of scientists, representatives of civil society institutions and political leadership of the state to answer questions about the needs of further development of each individual, society and state and, accordingly, protect them from external and internal threats" [21].

4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Debate is one of the main factors in foreign policy choice. It needs new rules in the modern media landscape. The debate on foreign policy choice allows us to limit the negative mediatization impact, to overcome the influence of the oligarchy on political situation. Today, debates are not about a strategic choice between East and West, but about concrete steps to implement the European and Euro-Atlantic integration agenda. At the same time, the subject of political debates should be steps aimed at disintegration with the post-Soviet space. At this stage, the process of implementing foreign policy choice is characterized by the need to address such issues as finding the optimal model of settlement in Eastern Ukraine, streamlining of European and Euro-Atlantic integration in the context of armed conflict and occupation of Crimea.

The domestic ruling class, having made a strategic choice of foreign policy course, needs to determine the strategy of its implementation in modern conditions. The legal field sets the course for European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the Law of Ukraine "On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Concerning the Country's Refusal to Implement a Non-Bloc Policy" [22].

State institutions are in the center of the implementation of a certain paradigm of foreign policy choice. It is the state that is the determining actor: "The study of the state's role in transformation and development becomes especially relevant for post-Leninist societies, which must eliminate

the state from socio-economic life in accordance with the requirements of neoliberal consensus, although only the state can create an institutional coordinate system within which the market can function, capital is accumulated and social protection network is developed.” [23].

Debates on foreign policy choice play an important role in determining the national interest, in the implementation of rational electoral choice. In the debate on the definition of national interest, it is necessary to take into account the existing system of values of Ukrainian society. The authors agree with Academician V. Gorbunin: "... "values" that are the basis of state national interests, and such things as sovereignty, physical security of borders, internal stability – all these are only necessary elements to protect the values that form our society as free, democratic, tolerant and progressive” [24]. According to opinion polls, the common values for most Ukrainians are the following: "... the greatest value is “peace” (56.6%), “value of human life” (42.7%) and “human rights”(33.3%)” [25]. According to sociological monitoring provided by Professor A. Ruchka, the value transformations of Ukrainian society took place in 2016-2020: “Except for the values of state independence of Ukraine and democratic development of the country, all other value positions have significantly decreased in the ranking. These trends may mean that intensification of economic recession, political tensions, socio-cultural ambiguity and social inequality generates perceptions of living conditions that are unable to ensure the implementation of population's leading value priorities. Thus, the perception of respondents of today's inability to implement their value priorities leads to a decrease in their rating” [26].

The introduction of debate as an integral part of the electoral process is an urgent need. After all, as the political history of Ukraine shows, in accordance with the results of the election, there is an adjustment or a radical change in the foreign policy course. Examples of this are the results of the 1994, 2004 (so-called "third round") presidential elections, 2010 and 2014. In turn, the political debate on foreign policy choice is one of the factors in the electoral process that influences the course and outcome of campaigns.

It should be noted: "Obviously, the foreign policy choice was only one of the factors, but quite significant in the events of 2004 (the "Orange Revolution", Yushchenko's victory). And in the parliamentary elections of 2006 there was a rematch (victory of the "Party of Regions", which together with the Socialist Party of Ukraine and the Communist Party of Ukraine formed the "Anti-Crisis Coalition", which led to early elections in 2007) [14].

During election campaigns, attention is paid to foreign policy choice, and various parties and candidates offer their

own alternatives. The issue of foreign policy choice occupies an important place in the programs of the leaders of the 2019 presidential election campaign. Thus, V. Zelenskyi stressed the need for a referendum: “Ukraine’s movement towards NATO and other security alliances is a guarantee of our security, which I believe in and which must be confirmed through an all-Ukrainian referendum. My task is to make sure that the salaries of servicemen are at the level of NATO standards” [27]. Mr. Poroshenko focused on the foreign policy choice: “Our mission is to join the European Union and NATO. Only full membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance definitively and irrevocably guarantees our Ukrainian state independence, our Ukrainian national security [28]. The following arguments are presented: "The history of the XX and early XXI centuries has shown that an independent Ukrainian state is the cornerstone of democracy, freedom and peace in Europe, as well as an important component of security and protection of the entire Euro-Atlantic community" [28]. Yu. Boiko's program "Peace Development Plan for Ukraine" states: "... real neutrality and non-alignment of Ukraine; overcoming differences with all neighboring countries, including Russia" [29]. As for Yulia Tymoshenko, her program states: “The task of Ukrainian diplomacy, led by the President, is to go on the offensive and seek collective measures to force the aggressor to peace and the return of Crimea and Donbas. We will organize a real negotiation process and restore peace in accordance with the Budapest Memorandum. We will return peace and the occupied territories of Crimea and Donbas by military-diplomatic means” [30].

The quintessence of the mutual influence of domestic and foreign policy choice can be formulated as follows: Ukraine's pendulum swings, personified in the foreign policy courses of Ukrainian presidents, ultimately contributed to the pushing of foreign policy partners and caused a sharpened interest in Ukraine... The result was an increase in conflict in the region and the beginning of the struggle for Ukraine, which, however, is taking into account the own interests of Washington, Moscow and Brussels... Ukrainian-Russian relations should be considered the key in such a worldview coup. It can be argued that their content was not the formation of a new paradigm of relations, but a break with the centuries-old legacy of a common past” [31]. It should be noted that according to sociological research, the implementation of foreign policy choice is hindered by the following factors: “... lack of strategic vision of foreign policy (81%), lack of attention to personnel issues (61%), lack of coordination between public authorities (44%). More than half of the respondents (51%) believe that external aggression on the part of Russia is detrimental to efficiency, but as we can see, most of the problems lie in Ukraine itself” [32].

The authors state: "In the modern political discourse there is no space left for such a seemingly elementary achievement of the politics of the modern era and a marker of democracy as political debate. And if the fair requirement for modernization and democratization of Ukraine is rationality in implementation of policy, then in the informatization context, the weight of rational discourse increases. There are definitely problems with that. After all, today media discourse is formed by entertaining talk shows on political topics and revolves around media scandals. Debates have become taboo in the domestic media discourse even during electoral competitions. Not to mention the lack of rational debate in political discourse on policy–security issues, economic and social policy, European integration, etc." [33].

In Ukraine, rational debates on domestic policy and foreign policy choice have given way to mediatization. There is a simplification of political reality, individual interests prevail over national ones, and journalists and politicians often resort to emotional blackmail of citizens.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Political debate is a proven means of determining the directions of political and economic modernization. They have proven their effectiveness in the process of modernization and democratization of developed countries. Not only the result (victory of one of the parties) is

important here, but also the process – rational questions and answers, norms and rules (ability and desire to follow them), as well as a certain discipline of the participants and the moderator. Debates should be taught. There cannot be forbidden topics. It's not just about politics. The subject of debate is economics and culture, politics and politics, past, present and future. By the way, in Ukrainian society there was a thorough dialogue about the Soviet totalitarian legacy. Without rational debate, decommunization is superficial, it concerns the destruction of totalitarianism symbols, not a rethinking of its meanings. Where there is a decision-making process, there must be a debate. Of course, the debate process must accompany all stages of the foreign policy choice. The debate on European and Euro-Atlantic integration, despite its competitive nature, will unite society. After all, thanks to the new opportunities for interactivity that characterize the media landscape today, every citizen will be able to become not only an observer but also a debate participant. This requires the institutionalization of the debate. In the meantime, we must state that the existing political discourse on foreign policy choice is rather divisive. The authors emphasize that foreign policy integration must be preceded by domestic policy. Only an integrated society has a chance to implement an ambitious project of European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The rules for implementing political debates in the modern media landscape and defining the role of moderators and mediators need further clarification.

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