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Ukrainian-Russian Interstate Relations During the Presidency of Viktor Yanukovych – "Honeymoon Period" or "Coercion to Marriage"

1. Introduction

The Orange Revolution was a powerful blow to the *ambitious foreign policy* strategy of the leadership of the Russian Federation and, undoubtedly, viewed by the Russian political elite as a threat to its national interests.

On the one hand, the defeat of Viktor Yanukovych who was openly supported by the Russian government during the presidential race, was clearly a negative signal to Moscow. It seemed "the lesser evil", though. From the perspective of the Kremlin, it was the possible impact of the Orange Revolution on the situation in Belarus, Moldova, Caucasus and Central Asia that appeared much more dangerous.

At the same time, political analysts expressed fears that changes in Ukraine might threaten the Russian political system by triggering another "colour" revolution in the Russian Federation itself. Consequently, from 2005 on, taking various actions against the new Ukrainian government[1] was a logical reaction of Russia.

[1] A. Szeptycki, *Ukraina wobec Rosji. Studium zależności*, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2013, pp. 168–170.

Despite the fact that it was Moscow president Viktor Yushchenko paid his first official visit to[2], he remained imprinted in the minds of the Russian political elite as an anti-Russian leader[3].

It was only natural that in such a situation, the Kremlin anxiously awaited the Yushchenko's presidency to come to an end and hoped that his successor would be able to establish a more favourable dialogue. A few months before the next presidential elections in Ukraine, Dmitry Medvedev openly expressed his opinion on the issue. On August 11, 2009, in his "Message to Viktor Yushchenko, the President of Ukraine", he noted: "In Russia, we hope that the new political leadership of Ukraine will be ready to build the relations between our countries, which actually will meet the real aspirations of our peoples and the interests of strengthening of the European security"[4].

2. "Honeymoon period" of Ukrainian–Russian relations

Both foreign and domestic political analysts regarded Viktor Yanukovych as a pro-Russian politician. During the election campaign in 2009–2010, he clearly declared his desire to restore "friendly and mutually beneficial relations with the Russian Federation and the CIS countries"[5], by which confirmed his reputation.

Strengthening of the Ukrainian-Russian relations at all levels, implementation of the pre-election statements, was definitely observable at the very beginning of Yanukovych's presidency. The nature of a political and diplomatic dialogue as well as information support changed dramatically in bilateral relations. The full-scale work of Ukrainian-Russian Interstate Commission was unblocked. At the highest level meetings, a number of interstate, intergovernmental and interdepartmental agreements in various spheres[6] were signed.

Ukrainian-Russian interstate relations were especially active throughout the year 2010. On 21 April, 2010, in Kharkiv Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych and Russian President Dymitry Medvedev signed "The Agreement between Ukraine and Russia on the Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine" whereby the Russian lease

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[2] Сайт радіостанції "Голос Столиці", http://newsradio.com.ua, "Перший візит Порошенка: куди і навіщо", p. X, access: 13 VI 2014.

[3] Сайт Телевізійної служби новин телеканалу "1+1", http://tsn.ua, "Хто помирить Україну і Росію?", p. X, access: 4 XII 2008.

[4] Офіційний сайт Президента Російської Федерації, http://kremlin.ru, "Послание Президенту Украины Виктору Ющенко", p. X, access: 11 VIII 2009.

[5] Сайт журнала "Фокус", https://focus.ua, "Программа Януковича «Украина – для людей!»", p. X, access: 17 XII 2009.

[6] *Відносини ЄС – Україна – Росія: проблеми і перспективи (Аналітична доповідь Центру Размкова)*, "Національна безпека і оборона", 2012, no. 4–5, pp. 6–7.

on the Black Sea Fleet at the naval base in Sevastopol was extended beyond 2017 by 25 years "with an additional five-year renewal option (to 2042–47) unless one of the party notifies in a written form the other party about their termination, no later than one year before the expiry of agreement"[7].

On 27 April, 2010, at a briefing in Strasbourg, Viktor Yanukovych publicly questioned the expediency to continue Ukraine's membership in the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development GUAM which Moscow viewed as a kind of alternative to the Russian regional project in the post-Soviet space. On the other hand, some members of the new president's team publicly stated about the possible participation of Ukraine in the integrational associations initiated by Russia. Thus, on May 20, the Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov said that Ukraine was ready to consider the integration to the Common Economic Space of CIS[8].

On July 1, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the Law of Ukraine "On the Principles of Domestic and Foreign Policies" according to which one of the basic principles of our country in foreign policy was "Ukraine's compliance with the policy of non-alignment", which meant Ukraine's non-participation in military-political alliances[9]. The document also called for amending the Law of Ukraine "On National Security of Ukraine". In particular, some provisions referring the Euro-Atlantic integration[10] were removed from Articles 6 and 8 of the abovementioned law.

3. Challenges for Kyiv within the framework of the renewed Ukrainian-Russian partnership

These and a number of other steps in various areas during the first year of Viktor Yanukovych's presidency demonstrated a significant revision of the Ukrainian priorities in the direction of their unification with the national interests of the Russian Federation. Under those circumstances, there was an impression of radical and long-term improvement in Ukrainian-Russian relations. However, a detailed analysis of those facts and processes confirmed the

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[7] Інтернет-видання "Резонанс. Волинь", http://rezonans.volyn.net, "Харківська угода: повний текст", p. X, access: 28 IV 2010.

[8] А. Бульвінський, *Новий політичний курс Віктора Януковича та російські стратегічні інтереси*, "Віче", 2010, no. 20, p. 11.

[9] Офіційний портал Верховної Ради України, http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua, "Закон України «Про засади внутрішньої і зовнішньої політики»", p. X, access: 1 VII 2010.

[10] Сайт Військового інституту Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка, www.mil.univ.kiev.ua, "Закон України «Про основи національної безпеки України»".

correctness of the thesis expressed in 2012 in one of the analytical reports of the Razumkov Centre.

It is in particular about the fact that the "optimization" of relations was achieved mainly at the price of unilateral concessions on the part of Ukraine including the surrender of Ukrainian interests in joining NATO; extension of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation basing in Crimea; the rejection of the Ukraine's interpretation of a number of historical events; removal of the issue ensuring national-cultural needs of Ukrainians in the Russian Federation from the agenda of bilateral relations; the presence and growing influence of Russia in key sectors of the national economy; Ukraine's support of some of the Kremlin's political initiatives[11]; suspension of negotiations on the distribution of property of the former USSR abroad[12], etc.

However, these concessions did not change the attitude of Russian political elite to Ukraine which considered the neighboring country mostly as a facility of its own geopolitical interests, mainly as an important part of their integration structures. On the contrary, concessions of Kyiv only intensified the Ukrainian vector in Russian activity[13]. Accordingly, the year 2011 witnessed the decline of the Ukrainian-Russian "honey year" or "honeymoon"[14] as seen in both Ukrainian and Russian political discourses. In this way, the Deputy General Director of Razumkov Center while mentioning "the improvement in the atmosphere of the dialogue" remarked, that the compromise expected by Russia on the part of Ukraine had come to a red line. He emphasized the fact that for the Ukrainian government and its closest circle there was nothing left to hand over as the next step was the direct threat to their own interests. Expert of the Finnish Institute of International Relations Andrey Moshes expressed the same opinion. He noted the improvement of climate between Moscow and Kyiv after the so-called "Kharkiv agreements" but at the same time, he stated that Ukrainian-Russian interstate relations "had failed to come to the constructive path of improvement"[15].

Thus, the willingness of the parties to the mutual rapprochement did not mean the complete elimination of differences. There remained a number of unsettled issues in the bilateral relations, mainly: the territorial delimitation in

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[11] *Відносини ЄС – Україна – Росія: проблеми і перспективи (Аналітична доповідь Центру Размкова)*, "Національна безпека і оборона", 2012, no. 4–5, p. 7.

[12] О. Крамар, Батогом по прянику, http://www.ukrrudprom.com, p. X, access: 27 IV 2011.

[13] *Відносини ЄС – Україна – Росія: проблеми і перспективи (Аналітична доповідь Центру Размкова)*, "Національна безпека і оборона", 2012, no. 4–5, p. 7.

[14] Інформаційний портал "Обозреватель", http://ukr.obozrevatel.com, "Медовий рік скінчився", p. X, access: 17 II 2011; М. Сірук, *Рік після Харківських угод*, http://www.day.kiev.ua, p. X, access: 10 VI 2011.

[15] *Ibidem*.

the Azov-Kerch water area; the settlement of claims related to the allocation of property rights and obligations of the former Soviet Union; adaptation of economic relations between Ukraine and Russia after the establishment of the Customs Union with Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus; and extremely painful for Ukraine – gas issue[16].

From the point of view of the interests of Ukraine, the biggest rejection in Yanukovych-Azarov team was caused by the Russian position on the gas issue. The abovementioned concessions, along with the Law of Ukraine "On principles of state language policy" from July 3, 2012 and other "curtseys toward the Kremlin" by the ruling elite did not give the expected results. Numerous promises of the new Ukrainian leadership regarding the normalization of relations with Russia without solving the gas issue seemed unconvincing.

The Kharkiv agreement, offering a discount for Ukraine gas price (100 USD per thousand cubic meters of gas), was interpreted by the Ukrainian government as a significant success. Prime Minister Mykola Azarov declared that for Ukraine it was a favourable period of low gas prices, which should be used for modernizing of the economy and reducing its energy consumptions. The then Prime Minister also suggested that the period might last for 7–8 years.

Yet, only a year later the situation proved catastrophic for Ukraine. On February 25, 2011, a year after the inauguration, Viktor Yanukovych said that "the price for gas doesn't hit the heart, just close to it", which was very eloquent. In the last quarter of 2011, the price of natural gas supplied for Ukraine, even being discounted, reached 400 dollars per thousand cubic meters, while Germany paid 319 dollars per thousand cubic meters[17].

4. Growing pressure of Russia

The Ukrainian leaders made chaotic attempts to change the existing arrangements, whereas the Russian side was trying to make the most of the situation in its favor. In August 2010, the head of Russian gas monopoly Alexei Miller said that Ukraine might expect gas at Russian prices only in case of "Naftogaz" and the union of "Gazprom". This proposal actually meant the two companies being merged into one under "Gazprom" auspices. In practice, this would allow Russia to control not only selling, but also the transportation of natural gas[18].

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[16] С. Толстов, *Українсько-російський діалог: від пошуку форми до визначення змісту*, "Зовнішні справи", 2010, no. 7, p. 13.

[17] П. Герасименко, *Українсько-російське газове протистояння: серіал триває*, http://zaxid.net, p. X, access: 3 XI 2011.

[18] *Ibidem*.

Thus, unlike the poorly thought-out tactics and non-consistent behavior of Ukrainian leadership, Russia implemented its sophisticated multi-strategy. At the beginning of 2013, Ukrainian energy experts Michael Gonchar and Maxim Alenov suggested that due to claims of "Gazprom" to "Naftogaz" the Kremlin hoped to force Ukraine to agree on the surrendering of gas transport system at the least, or to do even better by making GTS surrender in the package of accession to the EurAsEC and the Customs Union[19]. Therefore, the gas issue, which was a priority for the Ukrainian side in the dialogue between Kyiv and Moscow, was associated by Russian party with integration issues as being of primary importance. Russian leadership actively tried to bring Ukraine to a full-scale participation in the "Integration triad" Customs Union – the Single Economic Space – Eurasian Union. Cooperation formula "3 + 1" proposed by Ukrainian side did not suit the Russian Federation [20].

Fundamental problems in the Ukrainian-Russian relations in the period preceding the "Revolution of dignity" proved that mere participation of Ukraine in the CIS free trade zone was not enough for Russia's ambitions. On October 18, 2011, Mykola Azarov signed the CIS free-trade zone agreement with seven other former Soviet republics in St. Petersburg which came into force in September the following year[21]. However, there were no fundamental changes in the relations between the countries. Furthermore, "trade wars" were used as means of pressure on official Kyiv.

There is every reason to think that when Moscow had gained its strategic goal – blocking Ukraine`s membership in NATO, Russia directed its efforts at its threefold perspective: block the European integration of Ukraine; force Ukraine to join Putin's Eurasian integration project; undermine the efforts of the EU in the framework of Eastern Partnership Energy community [22].

Quite clearly expressed his opinion on this issue Russian President Dmitry Medvedev during the press conference on May 18, 2011. In particular, he said: "[…] if Ukraine, for example, chooses the European vector, it will certainly be much more difficult to find her way within the Common Economic Space and the Customs Union (Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus) as it is a different integration association […] Well, you cannot be everywhere. You can't have

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[19] М. Гончар, М. Алінов, *Справа – труба?*, "Дзеркало тижня", 2013, no. 4, 2.02, p. 1.

[20] *Відносини ЄС – Україна – Росія: проблеми і перспективи (Аналітична доповідь Центру Размкова)*, "Національна безпека і оборона", 2012, no. 4–5, p. 7.

[21] Сайт журналу "Тиждень.ua", http://tyzhden.ua, "Азаров підписав безстрокову угоду про зону вільної торгівлі СНД", p. X, access: 11 XI 2011; Офіційний портал Верховної Ради України, http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua, "Договір про зону вільної торгівлі", p. X, access: 18 X 2011.

[22] М. Гончар, М. Алінов, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

it both ways. You cannot simultaneously sit on two chairs, you need to make a choice"[23].

At the same time, Russia launched a purposeful and systematic campaign aiming at convincing Ukraine's leadership of accepting the fact that there was no alternative to Ukraine's integration into the structures of the CIS. The more Ukraine moved towards signing an Association Agreement with the EU, the severer became the pressure from Moscow.

Along with the gas issue, the Kremlin continuously used trade war as the main tool for pressure on the Ukrainian leadership. Such practice was not new, though. In 2005, after having been repeatedly criticized by the President of Poland Lech Kaczynski, the Kremlin banned imports of Polish meat. In 2006, Georgian security forces detained four Russian saboteurs on its territory. In response, the Kremlin banned selling "Borjomi" and all Georgian wine. Sanctions against Ukrainian dairy products[24] were imposed in the same 2006 and then in 2008.

Trade provided a powerful lever for Russia to influence Ukraine's policies throughout the entire period of Viktor Yanukovych's presidency. In fact, there was an increasing economic pressure by Kremlin hitting the most important sectors of the Ukrainian industry. On January 31, 2011, the Russian government approved a decision to extend (up to January 2016) prohibitive rates of duties on import of steel pipes from Ukraine. Moreover, in late December 2010, quota for the supply of pipes to Russia in 2011 was reduced to 300 thousand tons, while during the "confrontation" period in 2009 this number was 428 thousand tons, and in the years 2007–2008, 411–419 thousand tons respectively[25].

From time to time, the Kremlin initiated steps that told detrimentally on dairy products, in consequence of which Ukrainian producers and exporters suffered great losses. At the beginning of February, 2012, the Federal Service for Supervision of Consumer Rights Protection and Human Well-Being (Rospotrebnadzor) banned the import from several Ukrainian cheese factories. Within the month, the ban already concerned approximately half of the Ukrainian producers. Despite the fact that at the end of April, after talks in Moscow with participation of the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Ukraine

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[23] Л. Чекаленко, *Україна перед вибором*, "Науковий вісник Дипломатичної академії України", 2011, no. 17, p. 55.

[24] Сайт Центру Разумкова, http://www.razumkov.org.ua/ukr/expert.php?news_id=3368, "Торговими війнами Росія хоче виторгувати політичні поступки", p. X, access: 20 III 2012; Сайт Телевізійної служби новин телеканалу "1+1", http://tsn.ua, "Росія вже 8 років забороняє українські продукти, а Київ не заборонив ввезення ще жодного", p. X, access: 3 IX 2014.

[25] Информационно-аналитический ресурс "УкрРудПром", http://www.ukrrudprom.com, "Батогом по пряннику", p. X, access: 27 IV 2011.

and chief state sanitary doctor of the Russian Federation Gennady Onishchenko most of restrictions were lifted, export of Ukrainian cheese to the Russian market decreased by 20%[26] compared to the previous year. The results of Russian inspections conducted at the Ukrainian plants recorded "numerous violations", as stated in the final documents, palm oil the cause of the "cheese war", was not found[27], though.

From that time on, "cheese wars" became a common occurrence in the Ukrainian-Russian trade relations. Various kinds of meat and fish products were added to the list making their supplies to Russia more and more complicated. As a result, according to the information of International Trade Center, pig breeding products exports from Ukraine to Russia dropped by almost five times[28] during the years 2012–2014.

Ukrainian automakers were also put under fierce pressure during the presidency of Viktor Yanukovych. On August 31, 2012, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev signed the law drafted by the Transport Ministry of the Russian Federation determining utilization fee for motor cars. Accordingly, due to the introduction of the utilization fee, the price for Ukrainian vehicles on the Russian market increased by 10–30%. It should be noted that on August 23 Russia joined the WTO. In this regard, the rate of customs duty on imported vehicles in Russia decreased from 30% to 25%. According to then executive director of the Association of National Automobile Manufacturers "Ukravtoprom" Yefim Khazan, the introduction of utilization fee was a kind of compensatory measures taken for strategic investors in the Russian automobile industry[29]. By making pressure on Ukraine, the initiators of the resolution, on the other hand, offered an alternative. In particular, the document clearly indicated that utilization fee did not refer to motor vehicles imported to the Russian Federation from

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[26] Сайт Информационного агентства "Інтерфакс-Україна", http://interfax.com.ua, "У Онищенко есть вопросы к двум украинским сырзаводам", p. X, access: 11 VI 2012; Інтернет-видання "IPress.ua", http://ipress.ua, "Заборона на імпорт: які українські товари може втратити Росія", p. X, access: 16 VIII 2013.

[27] Сайт Информационно-аналитического еженедельника "Зеркало Недели. Украина", http://zn.ua, "«Сырная война» России с Украиной официально завершена", p. X, access: 20 IV 2012.

[28] Сайт журналу "Тиждень.ua", http://tyzhden.ua, "Росія вводить обмеження на українське м'ясо та молоко", p. X, access: 26 IX 2012; В. Кравченко, *Продуктові санкції Росії мають ефект бумеранга*, http://forbes.net.ua, p. X, access: 10 IX 2014; Сайт веб-ресурсу "declaration.com.ua", http://declaration.com.ua, "Росія: тимчасова заборона на ввезення свинини з України", p. X, access: 5 I 2016.

[29] Інтернет-видання "IPress.ua", http://ipress.ua, "Україна все ж платитиме Росії утилізаційний збір", p. X, access: 31 VIII 2012; http://ipress.ua, "Експорт українських автомобілів до Росії подорожчав на 30%", p. X, access: 4 IX 2012.

the territories of the Customs Union member states which the status of the Customs Union's goods[30].

The Ukrainian government tried to find the way out. The Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov assured that a compromise would undoubtedly be reached and the fees regarding Ukraine would not be introduced. In this respect, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Ukraine developed four alternative schemes to reclaim the fees. However, neither offers nor threats from the representatives of the Ukrainian government, along with the introduction of corresponding steps in response[31] had any impact.

In the course of time, "stakes in the Ukrainian-Russian game" were raised. In 2013, it became apparent that there were favourable conditions for the Ukrainian leadership to sign the EU Association Agreement, containing the provision of the comprehensive free trade[32]. This prompted the Kremlin to even more drastic steps with the aim of demonstrating the vulnerability of Ukraine's economy.

In the first half of 2013 duty-free supplies of Ukrainian pipes to the Russian Federation were limited to 120 000 tons, accounting for less than half the volume of the previous year. Moreover, in mid-July 2013, The Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev declared about the full elimination of quotas on duty-free supply of Ukrainian pipes to Russian market[33]. Thus, the Russian government hit the enterprises belonging to influential Ukrainian businessmen Viktor Pinchuk and Serhiy Taruta[34]. In late July, Russia banned the products of confectionery company "Roshen" run by then businessman and current President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko. Interestingly enough, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova

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[30] Інтернет-видання "IPress.ua", http://ipress.ua, "Україна все ж платитиме Росії утилізаційний збір", p. X, access: 31 VIII 2012.

[31] Інтернет-видання "IPress.ua", http://ipress.ua, "Азаров погрожує Росії економічними санкціями", p. X, access: 16 VIII 2012; Інтернет-видання "IPress.ua", http://ipress.ua, "Україна все ж платитиме Росії утилізаційний збір", p. X, access: 31 VIII 2012; Інтернет-видання "IPress.ua", http://ipress.ua, "Україна ввела податок на російські автомобілі", p. X, access: 12 IX 2009.

[32] The experts and politicians were expressed confident, that the EU was ready to sign the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU without the implementation by the Ukrainian side all its commitments, including the release of Yulia Tymoshenko from the prison [in:] Ю. Мостова, Т. Силіна, *Російський план, осмислений і нещадний*, http://gazeta.dt.ua, p. X, access: 16 VIII 2013; Интернет-ресурс "Podrobnosti.ua", http://podrobnosti.ua, "Главной темой недели в Раде была евроинтеграция", p. X, access: 8 IX 2013.

[33] Інтернет-видання "IPress.ua", http://ipress.ua, "Заборона на імпорт: які українські товари може втратити Росія", p. X, access: 16 VIII 2013.

[34] Ю. Мостова, Т. Силіна, *Російський план, осмислений і нещадний*, http://gazeta.dt.ua, p. X, access: 16 VIII 2013.

and Tajikistan influenced by Russia announced checking on Ukrainian candies, however, they did not find any violations[35].

After targeted attacks against many Ukrainians, who had previously dared to speak in favour of European integration and criticize the Customs Union[36], sanctions against Ukrainian exporters and producers started to gain more momentum. On August 14, the Federal Customs Service of the Russian Federation listed each and every Ukrainian exporter as "risky". In practice, such actions led to a strict inspection of the vehicles transporting the products of Ukrainian producers on the Russian border. The procedure included unloading, weighing and reloading of goods[37]. Thus, Russia almost completely blocked the supply of goods from Ukraine[38] for an uncertain period of time.

During the following months, Russia demonstrated, as noted by Russian politician and director of the CIS Institute Konstantin Zatulin, "how things would work, if Ukraine's free- trade deal with the EU came into effect"[39]. In fact, Russia managed its borders "in manual mode" alternating relaxation and gain control[40].

5. The attempt of the Ukrainian authorities to play their "own role" and surrender of Yanukovych

Ukraine was forced to take vigorous steps in response. It should be noted that after the Revolution of Dignity, scientists and experts, both home and abroad, suggested that for President Viktor Yanukovych the path to European integration was like a game, an attempt to maneuver between the EU and Russia[41]. We believe that several factors may clearly prove the fact that, at least for a certain

[35] О. Попович, *Торговельні війни Росії. Чи вистоїть Україна на шляху до ЄС?*, http://naszwybir.pl, p. X, access: 8 X 2013.

[36] Ю. Мостова, Т. Силіна, *Російський план, осмислений і нещадний*, http://gazeta.dt.ua, p. X, access: 16 VIII 2013.

[37] Сайт журналу "Тиждень.ua", http://tyzhden.ua, "Без оголошення війни. Втрати України від російської торговельної блокади не перевищать 1% ВВП", p. X, access: 14 VIII 2013.

[38] Сайт Інформаційно-аналітичного тижневика "Дзеркало Тижня. Україна", http://dt.ua, "Україна поскаржиться у Євразійську комісію на «торговельну блокаду» Росії", p. X, access: 15 VIII 2013.

[39] Сайт інформаційної служби "Радіо Свобода", http://www.radiosvoboda.org, "Європа стала на захист України в економічній війні з Росією", p. X, access: 21 VIII 2013.

[40] В. Сич, *Постачання українських товарів до Росії нормалізувалися – Мунтіян*, http://newsar.ukrinform.com, p. X, access: 20 IX 2013; Інтернет-видання "Українська правда", http://www.pravda.com.ua, "На кордоні з Росією черги з фур через нові норми МС", p. X, access: 31 X 2013.

[41] *Przegląd sytuacji strategicznej – aspekty regionalne*, "Rocznik Strategiczny", 2013–2014, 2014, p. 31, Інтернет-ресурс "Korrespondent.net", http://ua.korrespondent.net, "Корреспондент:

period of time, Viktor Yanukovych intended to sign the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU. Such period was September and October of 2013.

As is known, in early September, the situation in the parliamentary fraction of the then ruling Party of Regions was rather complicated. Among the MPs there was a group of individuals who eagerly supported Ukraine's joining the Customs Union and were against rapprochement with the EU[42]. In such circumstances, on September 4, Viktor Yanukovych held a two-hour meeting with representatives of the Party of Regions. At the meeting, he was quite critical of the Kremlin's policy and declared that the European choice for Ukraine had no alternative. The fourth President of Ukraine also emphasized that Russia had failed to fulfill obligations undertaken by its leadership. He stressed the fact that Ukraine with the discount of $ 100 per thousand cubic meters of gas had to pay a higher price than Austria, Germany and Italy, who did not have such discounts. At the end of the meeting, Viktor Yanukovych asked those who were of different opinion to leave the meeting[43]. Naturally, nobody left the meeting. One of the participants, Alexander Volkov, said that Yanukovych had the way of convincing each and every member present at the meeting, so "having come with their own opinions, they left accepting that of the President's"[44].

The logical consequence of all that was the fact that the Party of Regions supported the so-called "European integration" laws in the parliament. The "Regionals" together with representatives of the opposition parties voted for the law that would promote Ukraine's signing the Association Agreement[45]. In mid-October, among all political forces represented in the parliament, the Party of Regions did it most eagerly[46]. The approval of the draft agreement by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (18 September 2013[47]) was also an important step

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Ілюзія бажання. Українська влада лише імітує прагнення до євроінтеграції", p. X, access: 19 XII 2011.

[42] Інтернет-видання "NEWSru.ua", http://www.newsru.ua, "У Партії регіонів розкол: Шуфрич створює «російську фракцію»", p. X, access: 3 IX 2013.

[43] Сайт Информационно-аналитического еженедельника "Зеркало Недели. Украина", http://zn.ua, "Янукович на встрече с регионалами сообщил, что выбор сделан: ассоциация с ЕС", p. X, access: 7 IX 2013.

[44] Интернет-ресурс "Podrobnosti.ua", http://podrobnosti.ua/928806-glavnoj-temoj-nedeli-v-rade-byla-evrointegratsija.html, "Главной темой недели в Раде была евроинтеграция", p. X, access: 8 IX 2013.

[45] Сайт Української служби BBC, http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2013/09/130905_parliament_eu_law_vc, "Євродень у парламенті: розглянули перші закони", p. X, access: 5 IX 2013.

[46] Інтернет-видання «Pravda.IF.UA", http://pravda.if.ua, "Прикарпатський нардеп-тушка не голосував за 3 євроінтеграційні закони", p. X, access: 15 X 2013.

[47] Інтернет-видання "NEWSru.ua", http://www.newsru.ua, "Уряд України схвалив проект Угоди про асоціацію з ЄС", p. X, access: 18 IX 2013.

forward, as it meant signing of the Association Agreement with the EU that included provisions for a comprehensive free trade zone.

However, the then Ukrainian leadership failed to keep to the course, which showed the Vilnius Summit. On November 21, the Ukrainian government headed by the Prime Minister Mykola Azarov adopted a resolution halting the preparations for signing the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius. He explained the decision by saying that Kyiv was bound to carefully evaluate the potential "cost" of integration to the European market to compensate it for possible losses on the Russian market, with the countries of the Moscow-led Customs Union and the CIS.

During the Vilnius Summit on the 28–29 November 2013, Viktor Yanukovych actually demanded from Brussels the providing for Ukraine multibillion loans and proposed starting three-way talks between Russia, Ukraine and the EU. The EU rejected trilateral and declared Ukrainian's claims inadmissible and unfounded. In response, Yanukovych refused to sign the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU. Furthermore, on the same evening, the "Berkut", following Yanukovich's orders, brutally beat students who gathered on Euromaidan in peaceful protest against sudden changes in foreign policy vector of the state leaders[48].

In this context, quite notable are the reasons why the then leadership of Ukraine took such a step. It is worth mentioning that already on November 21 Vice Prime Minister Yuriy Boyko, describing the situation of the Ukrainian economy at a press conference, said: "Since August of the current year, our country has lost 15–20 thousand of jobs, and approximately 30–40 billion of trade turnover"[49]. The "Russian's imprint" in Ukraine's economic hardship was obvious.

On November 22, during the conversation with President of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaite, Viktor Yanukovych stated that there was no possibility to sign the EU – Ukraine Association agreement at the Vilnius summit because of the pressure from the Russian Federation[50]. Simultaneously, on the same day, the Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov in his speech in the Parliament said that the Ukrainian delay of the Association Agreement was urged exclusively

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[48] И. Петерс, В. Ивахненко, *Надежды и интриги саммита*, http://www.svoboda.org, p. X, access: 28 XI 2013; Інтернет ресурс "Новини Країни", http://www.newskraine.com.ua, "Два роки тому Янукович не підписав угоду про асоціацію з ЄС у Вільнюсі", p. X, access: 29 XI 2015.

[49] И. Коцина, А. Артазей, И. Голотюк, А. Галух, *Виктор Янукович: «Украина не может подписать Соглашение об ассоциации из-за экономического давления и шантажа со стороны России»*, http://fakty.ua, p. X, access: 23 XI 2013.

[50] Медиа веб-сайт "Левый Берег", http://lb.ua, "Янукович заявил, что не может подписать ассоциацию с ЕС из-за шантажа России", p. X, access: 22 XI 2013.

because of the economic reasons and was merely a tactical decision. However, he slightly moved the accent. In particular, explaining the position of the government, he focused on the unreasonable prices for imported gas, debt to the International Monetary Fund, and unacceptable conditions announced by the government about new credit lines[51].

Having found refuge in the Russian Federation, Viktor Yanukovych gave other reasons for having refused to sign the agreement at the Vilnius Summit. Diverting attention from the Russian position, Yanukovych said that in October 2013[52] there emerged an evidence that the signing of the Association Agreement could have led to extremely negative ramifications for the entire agricultural sector, Ukrainian machine-building, transport engineering, energy and military-industrial complex. He also pointed out that terms of getting a loan announced by IMF on the eve of the Vilnius summit were absolutely unacceptable for Ukraine[53].

Undoubtedly, the mentioned factors had a significant impact on the decision. But apart from them, there were quite a number of other reasons, including ones we can only guess about. It is known that on 27 October and 9 November 2013, semi-official meetings of Viktor Yanukovych and Vladimir Putin took place. The first meeting was held in Sochi, the following at a military airfield near Moscow[54].

The lack of transparent information about the results of the visits of the Ukrainian president (let alone the fact that the discussion at the first meeting lasted more than 5 hours)[55], as well as the further actions of the Ukrainian state leadership indicate in no uncertain terms that their position coincided with that of the Yanukovych's at the Vilnius Summit.

Some of the Ukrainian and foreign politicians and experts suggest that Russian President used pressure and blackmailing tactics. Chairman of the

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[51] И. Коцина, А. Артазей, И. Голотюк, А. Галух, *Виктор Янукович: «Украина не может подписать Соглашение об ассоциации из-за экономического давления и шантажа со стороны России»*, http://fakty.ua, p. X, access: 23 XI 2013.

[52] Considering the facts, that in June 2012 the economic part of the Association Agreement was initialed, and in the middle of September 2013 its draft was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, this explanation undoubtedly was absurd.

[53] Сайт Інформаційного агенства "УНІАН", http://www.unian.ua, "Янукович пояснив, чому не підписав угоду з ЄС", p. X, access: 28 III 2014.

[54] Інтернет-портал «Цензор.Нет", http://censor.net.ua, "Янукович встречался с Путиным на военной базе в России, – источник в АП", p. X, access: 11 XI 2013.

[55] Интернет-издание "Главред", http://glavred.info, "Стало известно, о чем Янукович с Путиным говорили в Сочи", p. X, access: 29 X 2013; Інтернет-портал "Цензор.Нет", http://censor.net.ua, "У Януковича и Путина упорно молчат о результатах встречи президентов", p. X, access: 10 XI 2013.

Transcarpathian Regional State Administration Gennady Moskal claimed that he had spoken to a person who participated in Yanukovych's closed meetings in late 2013, during which the President announced that Putin had threatened to annex Crimea with eastern and southern Ukraine to follow[56] in case of signing the Association Agreement. In October 2014, Radosław Sikorski[57]expressed the same opinion about Putin's blackmailing Yanukovych. A Ukrainian politician Taras Chornovil claimed that Putin had threatened Yanukovych with physical liquidation[58] by one of the Ukrainian President's bodyguards.

Apparently, to confirm the objectivity of such information by providing direct evidence is unlikely possible. Yet, Yanukovych's behavior before and during the Vilnius summit indirectly indicates the likelihood of such scenario. There are reasons to assume that Yanukovych arrived in the capital of Lithuania with the clear awareness of the situation having no intention of signing the Agreement. European politicians turned a blind eye on Yulia Tymoshenko's not having been released.

Despite the statement of the Ukrainian government on November 21, President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, President of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaitė and European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Stefan Fule tried to persuade Yanukovych to sign the Association Agreement[59]. According to Aleksander Kwaśniewski, during talks in Vilnius Yanukovych was offered the $ 15 billion aid package and guaranteed support from Germany. However, the Ukrainian president was not open to any suggestions. It is easy to assume that Yanukovych arrived in Vilnius without even considering any possibility of signing the Association Agreement[60].

Thus, Russian leadership managed to implement their plan, whereas the proposed by Ukrainian an alternative version of negotiations in the EU – Ukraine

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[56] Интернет-издания "Vlasti.net", http://vlasti.net, "Чем Путин угрожал Януковичу перед Майданом", p. X, access: 29 IV 2015.

[57] Інформаційне агентство "ZIK", http://zik.ua, "Путин угрожал Януковичу забрать Крым в случае ассоциации с ЕС, – Сикорский", p. X, access: 20 X 2014.

[58] Інтернет-видання "Главк.info", http://glavk.info, "Чим Путін погрожував Януковичу: нові подробиці", p. X, access: 25 IV 2015.

[59] Z. Parafianowicz, M. Potocki, *Aby dobrze kłamać, trzeba mieć dobrą pamięć. Janukowycz jej nie miał [fragment książki "Wilki żyją poza prawem"]*, http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl, p. X, access: 18 IV 2015.

[60] Интернет-издания "РИА Новости Украина", http://rian.com.ua, "Квасьневский: Януковичу за Соглашение с ЕС гарантировали $15 млрд от МВФ", p. X, access: 10 IV 2015; С. Сидоренко, *Квасневський: ця війна, якщо станеться, буде страшною, в тому числі за кількістю жертв*, http://www.eurointegration.com.ua, p. X, access: 9 IV 2015.

– Russia[61] format and the request for $160 billion aid to modernize the Ukrainian economy failed as Brussels considered such proposals unacceptable.

6. Conclusions

After pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovych's election as president of Ukraine in 2010 there were positive changes in the relations between Kiev and Moscow. However, it soon became clear that the intensification of the dialogue was mainly due to concessions from Ukraine. Strategic national losses in exchange for tactical gains was the usual way of conducting Ukrainian-Russian relations. During four years of Yanukovych's tenure, his team failed to solve any single vital problem in the relations with the Russian Federation.

Using primarily economic leverages, the Russian leadership gradually increased the pressure on the Ukrainian ruling elite, encouraging to participate in integration processes in the CIS and pointing out that focusing on the EU was irrational. In March 2012, the political provisions were signed followed by the signing of the economic part of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU, which provoked increasing pressure from the Kremlin. Since there were no official statements from the Ukrainian leadership about abandoning European integration path, the Russian Federation actually blocked the Ukrainian-Russian border in August 2013. Bilateral relations appeared even at a lower level than they had been during the presidency of the pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko.

In response, Yanukovych took political steps which made Euro-integration feasible. Thus, signing of the Association Agreement with the EU during the Summit in Vilnius seemed a real perspective for Ukraine.

Yet, Yanukovych failed to stand his ground till the victorious end. Threats and blackmail from the Russian Federation, as well as the reluctance of the European Union to provide the then corrupt government considerable financial support, determined further steps of the then Ukrainian elites. On 29 November, 2013, Viktor Yanukovych withdrew from signing the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement in Vilnius on the offered terms, citing economic and political pressure from Russia.

On the evening of the same day, he ordered to clear up Independence Square from a small number of peaceful students who had spent a week on Maidan expressing their disagreement with the decision taken by the Ukrainian

[61] И. Петерс, В. Ивахненко, *Надежды и интриги саммита*, http://www.svoboda.org, p. X, access: 28 XI 2013.

government on 21 November. Thus, the Kremlin succeeded not only to prevent Yanukovych's team from progressing on the path towards European integration, but also to contribute to freezing the integration for an uncertain period of time.

The phenomenon that did not fit into the plans of the Russian leadership and completely leveled the results of the continuous work of Russia regarding Ukraine became the Ukrainian Euromaidan that turned into the Revolution of Dignity.

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Summary: The victory of Viktor Yanukovych in the presidential election seemed to have normalized the relations between official Kyiv and Moscow. Yet, a number of strategic issues in bilateral relations were not solved. The Ukrainian leaders were deeply concerned about the Russia's rigid position in the energy sector. The Russian leadership made little concession in Ukraine's moving toward European integration. Moreover, at the turn of the summer and autumn of 2013, the Russian Federation totally blocked the movement of goods between the two countries for an uncertain period of time, thus forcing official Kyiv to refuse to sign the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU. The growing Russian pressure initially provoked resistance from Viktor Yanukovych. The steps he took proved that the pro-European statements of the Ukrainian leadership were about to be carried out. However, the aggravating tension and increasing pressure from Russia and, to some extent, the reluctance of EU leaders to provide financial guarantees to the corrupt Ukrainian leadership, pushed Yanukovych to abandon the European integration altogether.

Keywords: foreign policy of Ukraine, Ukrainian-Russian relations, European integration, Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU, integration projects the former Soviet space

Relacje bilateralne Ukraina–Rosja w trakcie prezydentury Wiktora Janukowycza – miesiąc miodowy czy przymusowe małżeństwo?

Streszczenie: Zwycięstwo w wyborach prezydenckich Wiktora Janukowycza sprzyjało normalizacji stosunków między oficjalnym Kijowem a Moskwą. Jednak wiele strategicznych zagadnień w stosunkach dwustronnych nie zostało rozwiązanych. Przywódcy Ukrainy byli niezadowoleni ze sztywnego stanowiska Rosji w sektorze energetycznym. Rosyjskim przywódcom, w przeciwieństwie do tego, nie odpowiadał realny postęp Ukrainy w dziedzinie integracji europejskiej. Na przełomie lata–jesieni 2013 roku Federacja Rosyjska faktycznie całkowicie zablokowała na jakiś czas wymianę gospodarczą między dwoma państwami, zmuszając oficjalny Kijów do tego, aby odmówił podpisania Umowy Stowarzyszeniowej między Ukrainą a UE. Rosnąca presja rosyjska początkowo spowodowała opór ze strony Wiktora Janukowycza. Inicjowane przez prezydenta kroki wskazywały, że proeuropejskie deklaracje ukraińskiego kierownictwa mogą zostać zrealizowane w praktyce. Jednak wzmocnienie i dywersyfikacja presji ze strony Rosji, a do pewnego stopnia niechęć przywódców UE do przyznania skorumpowanym władzom ukraińskim gwarancji znacznej pomocy finansowej, popchnęły Janukowycza do odejścia od kierunku europejskiego.

Słowa kluczowe: polityka zagraniczna Ukrainy, stosunki ukraińsko-rosyjskiej, integracja europejska, Umowa Stowarzyszeniowa między Ukrainą a UE, projekty integracyjne na przestrzeni postsowieckiej